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Why are Weird Blocks Washing Up on Europe's Shores?

LOST AT SEA

10 PIRATES WHO
TERRORIZED
THE SEA

+ History's Most
Perplexing Coincidences

CONTENTS

Ancient Origins Magazine | Issue 15 | November 2019

FEATURES

- 08 An Unbreakable Story – Roman Flexible Glass
- 18 The Boundless Sea – A Human History of the Oceans
- 28 The Castaway that Inspired Robinson Crusoe
- 38 Poseidon's Daughters – A Myriad of Mermaids and Sea Maidens
- 52 Lost Crew – The Mystery of the Mary Celeste
- 54 10 Pirates Who Terrorized the Sea
- 64 Mystery at Sea – Floating Blocks with Cryptic Writing Wash Ashore
- 70 Dying to Live Forever – The Ritual of Self Mummification
- 78 Crazy Historical Coincidences



54

28



| REGULARS

- 04** Editor's Note
- 06** ArchaeoNews
- 14** Ritual Year: Ahoy, Me Hearties!
- 15** Artifact World: Boxing Yourself Up for a Good Night's Sleep
- 82** Academy of Taste: Borscht – Medieval Peasant Food That Traveled to Space!



08



18

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SPOTLIGHT: LOST AT SEA

“UNTIL YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO LOSE SIGHT OF THE SHORE, YOU WILL NOT KNOW THE TERROR OF BEING FOREVER LOST AT SEA” - CHARLIE COOK

For millennia, humans’ innate curiosity about their world has sparked a desire to explore, leading men and women to cross vast seas. In doing so, they faced untold dangers and hardships: merciless weather, unpredictable winds and waves, sea raiders and pirates, fragile vessels, rough conditions, and weeks or months in an immense, unknown expanse.

In this issue, we explore some of what has been Lost at Sea – pirate treasures, a ship’s crew, castaways, bottles with hidden messages, and even a mysterious set of floating blocks containing cryptic inscriptions which, for over a century, have been washing up on beaches across Europe.

History is replete with stories of both heroics and tragedies of seafarers as they set off on quests to discover new lands, to trade, (or to raid) across uncharted waters. Maritime

historian Professor David Abulafia takes us on a journey through the human history of the ‘Boundless Sea’, as ancient people around the world set a course across the vast oceans.

Faced with uncertainty and isolation on these treacherous voyages across the world, a rich mythology emerged. Legendary creatures lurked in the depths of dark waters, and a myriad of mermaids and sea maidens lured sailors into the sea, never to be seen again.

Surviving maritime perils, we come ashore and

explore some weird and wonderful accounts from history: the jaw-dropping Buddhist ritual of Self-Mummification, the lost Roman invention of unbreakable, flexible glass, and historical coincidences whose odds were so incredibly small that they appear almost miraculous! ■



JOANNA GILLAN

Chief Editor, Ancient Origins Magazine

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE...



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Egypt

THE INNER MYSTERIES OF EGYPT AND THE NILE

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TRAVEL
THE
UNKNOWN



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Archaeonews

BY JOANNA GILLAN

Shipwreck Yields Treasures

The Greek Ministry of Culture has announced a series of finds that have emerged from one of the world's most famous shipwreck sites. Bones and a range of obscure objects were recovered from the seabed near the Antikythera shipwreck.

The 2,200-year-old shipwreck, which was first found over a century ago off the island of Antikythera in Greece, is famous for the remarkable mechanism found there. Often called 'the world's first computer', the complex device was used for detailed astronomical predictions.

The wreck has yielded many other archaeological treasures over the years, including marble and bronze statues, jewelry, and coins. The latest finds include a bronze ring, amphorae, olive kernels, bronze nails, and four bronze spikes on a piece of wood—possibly used in the construction of the ship.

Divers also recovered a number of bones, which are currently undergoing analysis. It is not yet known if they are animal or human, but it is most likely that they are the remains of the sailors who died in the wreck over two millennia ago.

Marsayas/CC BY SA 3.0



Above: The Antikythera Mechanism

Left: Artifacts found at the underwater site of the wreck

Hidden Pyramid in Saqqara

In a recent documentary titled *Opening Egypt's Great Tomb* on Britain's Channel 5, Egyptologist Dr. Vasko Dobrov announced that he has found evidence of a hidden pyramid buried beneath the Saqqara desert, located north-west of the burial place of Pharaoh Pepi I, in Tabet al-Guesh.

Dr. Dobrov revealed that a scan using the latest geophysical technology identified a square structure beneath the sand that appears to be man-made, measuring approximately 240 by 240 feet. He believes it is the base of a pyramid built for Pharaoh Userkare (23rd century BC).

The Egyptologist argues that this pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty did not live long enough for his pyramid to be built and may only have had time to create the pyramid base. The expert believes that the location was likely the site of the Userkare pyramid because it is near his father's and other family members' burial places. If he is proven right, it could mean that there are many more pyramids yet to be found in Egypt.



Djoser's famous step pyramid at the Saqqara necropolis, Egypt

Vikings Brought Leprosy to Ireland

The skeletal remains of five bodies excavated in Ireland suggest Vikings brought leprosy to the Emerald Isle.

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic infectious disease that is caused when *Mycobacterium leprae* attacks the peripheral nerves, affecting the mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract, the skin, and eyes.

How the infectious disease made its way to Ireland has always been a thing of mystery until a new study by researchers at Queen's University Belfast and academics in England, found that the disease might have been delivered by ninth-century Scandinavian Vikings.

Researchers studied microbial data from five excavated bodies in Ireland, two of whom were native to Scandinavia. A number of strains of the ancient leprosy bacterium (*M leprae*) were identified in the five bodies. Professor Mike Taylor, a bioarchaeological scientist at the University of Surrey said that two strains of leprosy discovered in the remains were "highly similar" to those found in medieval Scandinavians, which increases the likelihood that this was the origin.. ■



An **UNBREAKABLE** Story

The Lost Roman Invention of Flexible Glass

IMAGINE a glass you can bend and then watch it return to its original form. Imagine there's a glass that you drop but it doesn't break. Stories say that an ancient Roman glassmaker had the technology to create a flexible glass, 'vitrum flexile', but a certain emperor decided the invention should not be...

Flexible glass is allegedly a type of unbreakable glass that was invented during the Roman period. Man-made glass (as opposed to a naturally occurring one such as obsidian) is widely accepted to have been invented by the Phoenicians. Over thousands of years, glassmakers honed their skills, improving the

By Wu Mingren





techniques, as well as the glass itself. In the Roman Empire, glass became a commonly produced item, though special luxury glasses were also created. Arguably one of the most intriguing of these glass types is the so-called flexible glass.

TALES OF THE FAMED ROMAN GLASS

Flexible glass is said to be a legendary lost invention dating to the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar. While no physical evidence of such a glass has been found so far, there are two main written sources attesting to its existence. One of these is Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* and the other is the *Satyricon*, commonly attributed to the Roman courtier Petronius. While Pliny's work is encyclopedic in nature, that of Petronius is a piece of satire - showing how this incredible story was picked up by writers of different genres.

In *Natural History*, Pliny reports that flexible glass was made by a glassmaker during the time of Tiberius Caesar. Instead of gaining the favor of the Roman emperor, said craftsman had his workshop shut down. This was meant to prevent the value of precious metals, i.e. gold, silver, and copper, from being depreciated by this new material.

A similar story is said to have been reported by Cassius Dio and Suetonius. Pliny expresses his doubts regarding the veracity of this story, as he mentions that "This story, however, was, for a long time, more widely spread than well authenticated."



Roman Glass, Landesmuseum Württemberg, Stuttgart. | Carole Raddato/CC BY SA 2.0

Obsidian is produced when volcanic lava cools rapidly with minimal crystal growth. Ancient human ancestors have been using obsidian to make tools and weapons for at least 700,000 years. Obsidian was valued in Stone Age cultures because it is hard and brittle, causing sharp edges when it fractures. Since then, it has been used to make surgical scalpels, mirrors, knives, and decorative objects.



Petronius's telling of the story in his *Satyricon*, on the other hand, may be described as a more dramatized version of the story told by Pliny. In the satirist's account, the man who invented flexible glass was granted an audience with the Roman emperor to show his work. After Tiberius examined the glass cup, he handed it back to the glassmaker, who proceeded to throw it with all his might onto the floor. The emperor was shocked at what had happened, but the man calmly picked the cup up from the ground, showing the emperor that it was only dented. The glassmaker then took a little hammer to beat the glass, and in no time, the cup regained its original shape.

The Roman glassmaker was confident that he had impressed the emperor and was probably waiting to be rewarded for his ingenious creation. When the emperor asked if anybody else knew how to make this kind of flexible glass, the craftsman answered in the negative. Instead of receiving the reward he had hoped for, the glassmaker was executed, thus taking the secret of making flexible glass with him to his grave. The reason given for this drastic act was that this Roman invention would cause gold to be devalued, as mentioned by Pliny.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE ROMAN FLEXIBLE GLASS?

Today, the story of Roman flexible glass is mainly treated in the same manner as it was by Pliny, that is, with much doubt. Nevertheless, there have been some speculations on how this glass may have been made. One of these, for instance, is that the Roman glassmaker had somehow had access to boric acid or borax, both of which can be found naturally. By adding a small percent of boric oxide to the glass mixture, the end result would be something that was relatively unbreakable. It may be added that borax was imported from the East into Europe on a regular basis during the Middle Ages, and it was used by goldsmiths as a flux. Boric acid could also be found in the steam vents of the Tuscan Maremma to the north of Rome, though this was supposedly only realized during the 19th century. Nevertheless, it is possible that the glassmaker may have stumbled on this source by chance. In any case, it is likely that the recipe for Roman flexible glass, if it did exist at all, will continue to elude us and remain a 'lost invention of the Romans'. ■

After Tiberius examined the glass cup, he handed it back to the glassmaker, who proceeded to throw it with all his might onto the floor



Roman glass bottle decorated with white, blue, and gilded snake-threads. Strips of coloured glass were twisted with a contrasting coloured thread of glass before being fused together. This was a popular method in the early period, but appears to have gone out of fashion by the mid-1st century AD

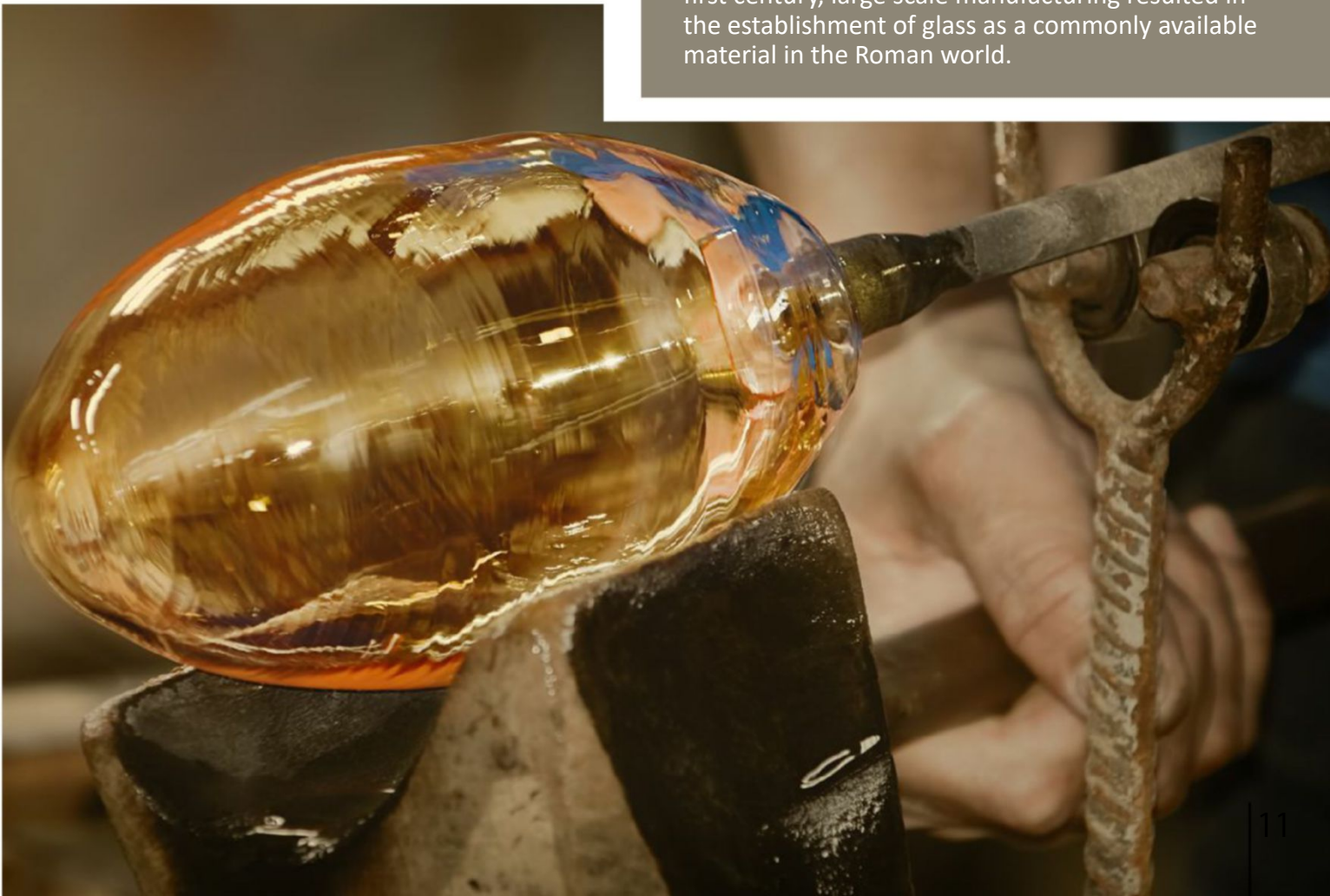
Translucent emerald green, an innovation of the Roman glass industry itself. Early Imperial, Julio-Claudian.



Translucent yellow green with two Greek inscriptions, leaves, and vines. Blown in a three-part mold. Mold-blowing developed as an offshoot of free-blowing.



In the Roman Empire, glass was used primarily for the production of vessels, although mosaic tiles and window glass were also produced. While Roman glass production developed from Hellenistic technical traditions, the industry underwent rapid technical growth under the Romans in the first century AD. The Romans introduced glass blowing and specialized in colorless glass. By the end of the first century, large scale manufacturing resulted in the establishment of glass as a commonly available material in the Roman world.



The Sun God

Inti, the sun god and son of Viracocha, the supreme deity, has been claimed by the rulers of the Inca Empire to be their direct ancestor, who brought them civilization. As a solar deity, Inti is closely associated with agriculture, as his heavenly body provides the warmth and light needed for crops to grow, so he was a prominent god among the farmers. While Inti was normally a benevolent god, he was also capable of great anger, and solar eclipses were believed to be a manifestation of this displeasure. In such situations, the Inca would appease their deity by making offerings. Inti Raymi is a special festival dedicated to Inti, held on the winter solstice in June when sacrifices of white llamas, livestock, food offerings, and even farmland were made.

Carlos Santa Maria |
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CHARLES CHRISTIAN'S

Ritual Year



Ahoy,
Me Hearties!

NO it's not *International Talk Like a Pirate Day* (the next one is not until September 19, 2020) but as the theme for this month's magazine is matters nautical, or at least 'lost at sea', I thought I would look at some common maritime myths and superstitions.

My starting point is the belief in *Dies Infaustus* – Latin for 'unlucky day'; in other words, these were days old seamen were said to be ill-omened and, therefore, not good days on which to start a voyage. Fridays were considered to be the unluckiest day of the week as Jesus Christ was said to be crucified on a Friday. This is a belief that stretches back to the Middle Ages.

Thursdays were also considered unlucky because it is the day named after Thor, the pagan god of storms and thunder, which was clearly not something you wanted to encounter in the days of wooden sailing ships! There was a similar, equally understandable, superstition in 18th-century New England that rolling clouds and roaring waves were a bad omen. Sundays were to be avoided because any god-fearing sailor should be attending church and saying his prayers. On a personal note, growing up in a seaport town, I observed fishermen had no objection to setting sail on the first available high tide on a Sunday evening – presumably they were done praying by then.

Another 'bad' day was the first Monday in April since this was supposedly the day the biblical Cain slew Abel. You could also forget the second Monday in August, as that was when the legendary cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were

destroyed. Finally, there was also a reluctance to set sail on Candlemas Day (February 2). The belief was that any voyage begun then would end in disaster. This seems to be related to the old superstition of removing all Christmas decorations by Candlemas, a practice that continued well into Victorian times.

Any discussion of unlucky dates to sail would not be complete without reference to the urban myth surrounding the English warship H.M.S. Friday. As with all urban myths, the details of the story vary but it goes something like this...

At some point during the 19th century, the Royal Navy attempted to finally dispel the old superstition among sailors that beginning a voyage on a Friday was certain to bring bad luck. To demonstrate the falseness of this belief, they decided to commission a ship named H.M.S.

Friday. Her keel was laid on a Friday. She was launched on a Friday. Her commander was a Captain James Friday. She set sail on her maiden voyage on Friday 13. And she was never seen or heard from again!

It's one of those truth-is-stranger-than-fiction-type items that crop up from time-to-time in newspapers, magazines, and on television, but the truth is there has never been any Royal Navy ship called H.M.S. Friday. The story's

origins are unclear but it seems to have gained in popularity in the latter part of the 20th century after being recounted by Irish comedian Dave Allen on the February 4, 1971 episode of his BBC television show *Dave Allen at Large*. ■

Sundays were to be avoided
because any god-fearing sailor
should be attending church and
saying his prayers



Charles Christian is a barrister and Reuters correspondent turned writer, award-winning tech journalist, radio presenter, podcaster, blogger, storyteller, and sometime werewolf-hunter who presents a weekly podcast: the Weird Tales Radio Show.

BOXING YOURSELF UP FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP



BY SARAH P YOUNG

THE medieval box bed, sometimes known by its French name of *lit clos*, is a bed built into a piece of furniture. It looks curious to us today and it's somewhat of a novelty to climb into bed and shut the doors behind you, but 600 years ago this kind of bed was very popular.

As its name implies, the box bed is a bed that is completely contained within a wooden box. There were a lot of variations in design; some had curtains for privacy, while others were completely closed off with sliding wooden doors. They could be built in a number of ways to utilize the space available; some were freestanding and could be moved, but others were built into recesses of a room.

The most well-known description of a box bed is in Emily Bronte's 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights*. By the time of the novel, the box bed was a thing of the past, but even then Bronte noted how "very conveniently designed" box beds were, admiring them for the practicality of giving each member of the family their own privacy with no need for individual rooms, and for the fact they made the person feel very secure when he was in the bed with closed panels.

While they were already obsolete by the time of Bronte's novel, the box bed had a long history of use. Its roots come from Medieval Brittany. By the 16th Century, examples of box beds could



18th century decorated box bed. Austria

Wolfgang Sauber/CC BY SA 3.0

be found across Europe, including France, Scotland, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Austria. As they became more popular, more commonplace designs advanced and in the 18th century, box beds could be quite sophisticated and cleverly designed to blend into the room and look like inconspicuous cabinets.

While they seem a bit odd or even claustrophobic to us today, box beds were a very practical solution to a lot of problems faced by people living in Medieval Europe. Firstly, they provided a private space. Many families slept in the same room at that point, and poorer families often lived in dwellings with only one room even as recently as the Victorian era, particularly in rural communities. The

beds meant that people were able to retreat to a private part of the room, and they also helped to divide the room up.

Secondly, the enclosed nature of the box bed means they are very warm, and keeping warm could be a matter of life or death in Medieval times – this probably explains why box beds were in use in frigid Scandinavia for longer than elsewhere.

One final upside to the box bed is that the examples with doors and panels also helped to keep people safe. While it may not have happened often, in rural areas there was always a risk that a dangerous animal like a wolf might get into the house. Box beds kept the individuals in the dwelling safe, at least while they slept. ■

Spotlight

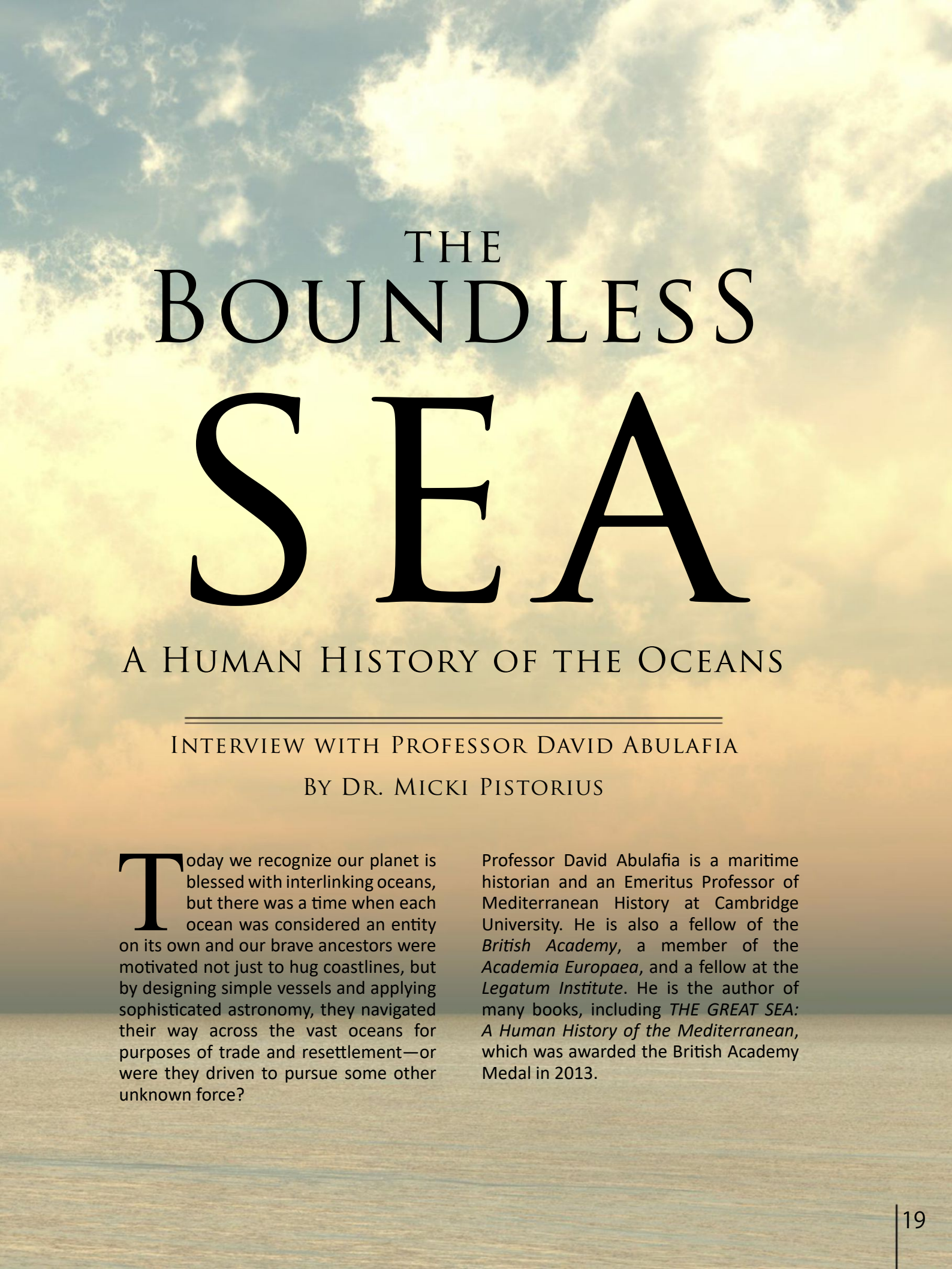
LOST AT SEA





The Sinking of the Centaur, James Northcote, 1796





THE BOUNDLESS SEA

A HUMAN HISTORY OF THE OCEANS

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DAVID ABULAFIA

BY DR. MICKI PISTORIUS

Today we recognize our planet is blessed with interlinking oceans, but there was a time when each ocean was considered an entity on its own and our brave ancestors were motivated not just to hug coastlines, but by designing simple vessels and applying sophisticated astronomy, they navigated their way across the vast oceans for purposes of trade and resettlement—or were they driven to pursue some other unknown force?

Professor David Abulafia is a maritime historian and an Emeritus Professor of Mediterranean History at Cambridge University. He is also a fellow of the *British Academy*, a member of the *Academia Europaea*, and a fellow at the *Legatum Institute*. He is the author of many books, including *THE GREAT SEA: A Human History of the Mediterranean*, which was awarded the British Academy Medal in 2013.

THE POLYNESIAN NAVIGATORS PROVED THAT ONE CAN SOLVE SOME CHALLENGING PROBLEMS WITHOUT ANY TECHNOLOGY AT ALL, JUST THE SUPER-COMPUTER OF THE HUMAN BRAIN

MP: *Evidence shows trade in the eastern Atlantic from Neolithic times, and islands north of New Guinea were colonized 35,000 years ago, hinting at navigation out of sight of land. Can you tell us about the two main motivations to cross the seas – trade and resettling – and do you think there may be an as yet undiscovered motivation such as some ancient lost religion?*

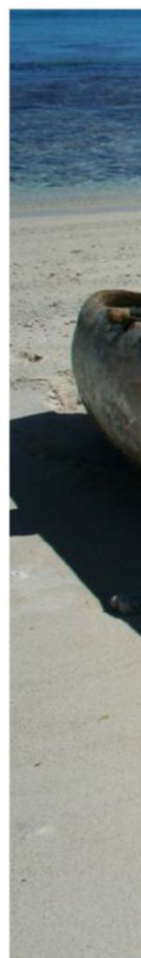
DA: The reasons why the peoples of the ancient Pacific spread across such a vast oceanic space are still mysterious. Since the settlement of islands occurred over several millennia, only ending with the arrival of humans in New Zealand around 1300 AD, one should not assume that the reasons were the same in all periods. For instance, some archaeologists have suggested that rising sea levels led to the loss of precious land on small islands, prompting their inhabitants to go and explore for more places to live. But that would not explain why people continued to move when sea levels were not rising. Over-population may well be a good general explanation, with customs developing that younger sons should head off to find new places to live. As people moved from island to island, they realized that each place had different natural resources. For example, the hard, volcanic stone known as obsidian could not be found everywhere, but produced extremely sharp knives. So, the exchange of such items for food or other objects became common, from island

to island. As for religious motivations, these are not discussed much by archaeologists, but it is not impossible that the search for the place where the sun rises or other religiously-inspired ideas may have motivated some sailors, such as those who ended up in the very remote Easter Island.

THE OLDEST OCEAN, THE PACIFIC - 17600 BC

In the 1770s, Captain Cook was intrigued to find that the languages spoken in Hawaii, Tahiti, and New Zealand were mutually comprehensible and that what are now called 'Oceanic' languages were spoken across the whole north-south span of Polynesia. Yet the Polynesians had no technology or written reference to navigate such distances. How did they do it?

Tupaia, a Polynesian navigator who accompanied Captain Cook, astonished Cook's companions by his almost instinctive awareness of where the ship stood, without instruments or written records. The Polynesian navigators proved that one can solve some challenging problems without any technology at all, just the super-computer of the human brain. This was not casual knowledge, but a science learned during a long apprenticeship, through practical experience and by way of an elaborate oral tradition.





Captain Charles Clerke who sailed with Captain Cook, with Maori man of New Zealand, 1776



A Polynesian canoe

THE VERY SMELL OF THE SEA AIR WOULD HELP GUIDE A SAILOR TO A KNOWN HAVEN

Even in the 1930s, these methods were taught to boys, beginning at the age of five, as the story of a celebrated sailor from the Carolinas named Pailug reveals. Once his grandfather decided that the boy should become a navigator, he had to spend his time listening to stories of the sea and acquiring information about the science of navigation. His grandfather assured him that as a navigator he would be better than a chieftain, would eat better food than others and would be respected throughout society. By the age of 12 he was traveling the ocean with his grandfather, and he began to master the secrets of the sea – the movement of birds, the changing map of the stars, but also magical lore. All this was committed to memory, leading to a full initiation around the age of 16 which involved a month of seclusion during which his teachers bombarded him with the knowledge he needed. He had no use for written texts, but he made models out of sticks and stones that he could memorize and rebuild, when the time came to instruct the next generation in the art of navigation.

The Polynesians did not necessarily require a compass of any sort. There is the story of a schooner captain who lost his compass overboard and confessed to his Polynesian crew that he was lost. They told him not to worry and took him where he wanted to go. Puzzled by the ease with which they had achieved this, he asked how they knew where the island was. “Why,” they replied, “it has always been there.” In cloudy weather, any break in the clouds at night-time had to be exploited immediately; but there were other signs such as the swell of the sea, that a practiced navigator could use to identify where the boat was heading. There were plenty of additional signs, various combinations of which made a landfall a certainty. Land could be detected through the flight of birds such

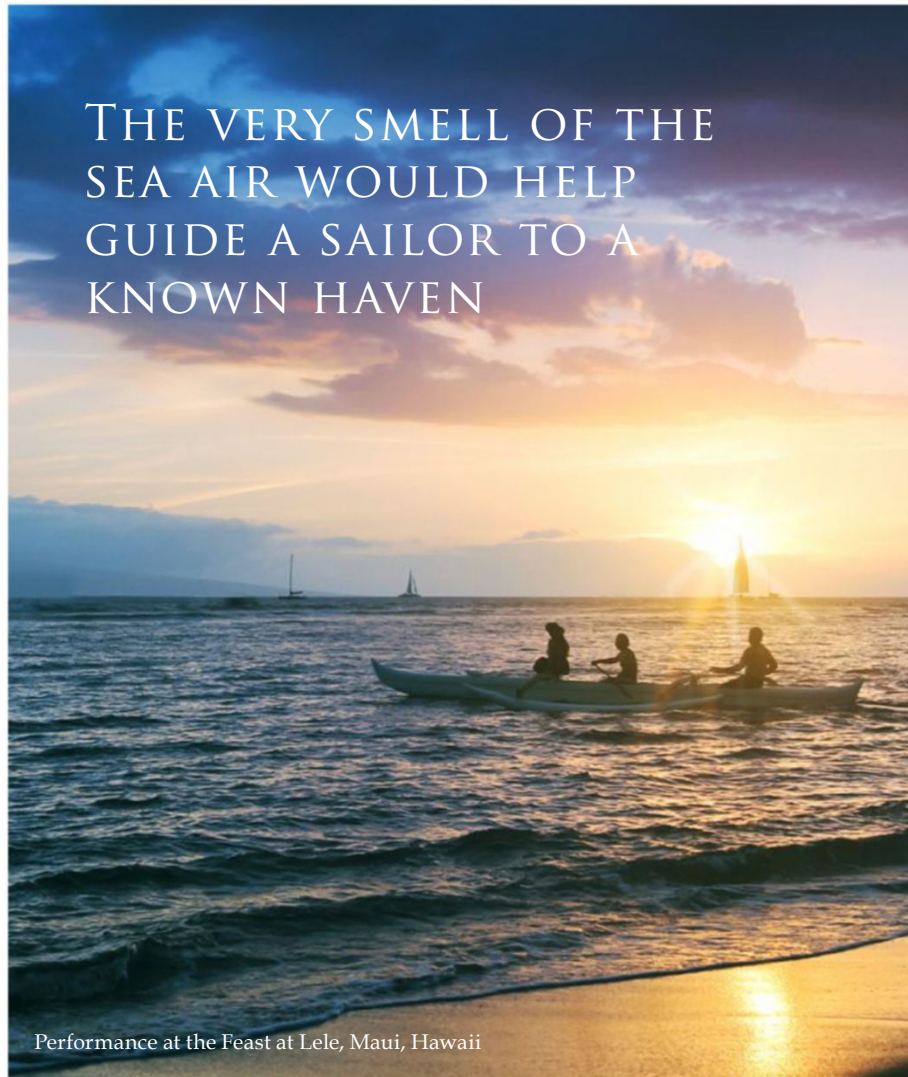
as terns coming out to sea to feed. Other signs included cloud formations, which might change color, reflecting the land that lay underneath (coral atolls would cast an opal tinge on the cloud above). The very smell of the sea air would help guide a sailor to a known haven.

One of the most extraordinary methods of navigation was what might be called the Polynesian Theory of Relativity, a system known in the Carolina Islands as *etak*. Here, the assumption was that the boat remained still and the rest of the world moved. Judgments, therefore, had to be made about how the position of the islands altered in relation to the boat – a relationship not

just between the boat and its destination, but between the destination and another island in the vicinity; the method depended on placing this third point accurately in relation to the stars. This was not perhaps Einstein; but it involved some powerful mental geometry, not to mention an astonishingly detailed, carefully memorized, mobile map of the heavens.

Who were the Lapita people and why does Lapita represent a change in oceanic expansion?

The name given to the culture that spread across vast tracts of the prehistoric Pacific from about 1600 BC onwards is ‘Lapita’, the name of the



Performance at the Feast at Lele, Maui, Hawaii



archaeological site where their distinctive culture was first identified. No other prehistoric culture embraces such a large geographical area, in this case including both the Solomon Islands, which had been settled very early, and islands as remote as Fiji and Samoa. They probably consisted of a mix of peoples of various origins who gave rise to the varied populations of Polynesia and much of Melanesia; the uniformity of their culture was not necessarily backed by uniformity in their appearance, and woolly-haired Melanesians and straight-haired Polynesians (those are already generalizations taken too far) participated in a single culture.

ADrift AT SEA

THE OLDEST MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE



Over 130 years ago, a bottle was cast overboard during a voyage of a German merchant sailing barque. It floated its way across the globe for over a century, until it landed on Wedge Island, about 90 miles north of Perth in Australia. Half-buried in the sand, the dark glass stood out amongst the white grains.

Messages in bottles are known to have been used since ancient times. Towards the end of the fourth century BC, the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (a pupil of Aristotle) is recorded to have released messages in bottles in order to test his hypothesis that the Atlantic Ocean flowed into the Mediterranean Sea.

In 16th-century England, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, an 'Uncorker of Ocean Bottles' was appointed by the court, as it was thought that some bottles may contain secret messages sent by English spies from France. Therefore, it was a capital offense for anyone else to open a bottled message.

In more recent times, messages in bottles have been, and still are, used in the discipline of oceanography as a means of studying global currents. Typically, researchers

would release thousands of bottles with messages into the oceans from ships and then wait for people who found these bottles to contact them. The Drift Bottle Project was initiated in 2000 by Eddy Carmack, a climate researcher at Canada's Institute of Ocean Science. The initial goal of this project was to study the ocean currents around northern North America. In the following 12 years, the project brought Carmack's bottles across the world. About 6,400 bottles were released by the researchers, of which 264 have been found and reported.

The bottle found on Wedge Island was thrown from the German sailing barque Paula, which was commanded by Captain O. Diekmann from 1886-1889. It would have probably been carrying Welsh steaming coal from Cardiff at the time when the bottle was dropped – as this was a major Welsh export at the time.

The bottle was thrown overboard as part of a 69-year-long oceanographic experiment that was interested in improving shipping routes by following ocean currents.

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As speakers of the Austronesian languages mixed with the population along and off the coast of New Guinea, an ethnically mixed population came into being, whose varied origins are reflected in their DNA. The Lapita folk brought pottery, which is their distinctive archaeological 'signature', and they brought animals for which there is no earlier evidence in the islands, notably pigs, dogs, and domestic birds. In broad terms, they were a Neolithic ('New Stone Age') people or group of peoples, familiar with agriculture, stock-rearing and ceramics. Farming transformed the environment of one island after another, as land was cleared for agriculture and as local species of birds were hunted, eaten, and driven to extinction; the most famous case, much later, would be the giant *moa* birds of New Zealand, but there were local crocodiles and giant iguanas that proved unable to resist human conquest.



THE MIDDLE OCEAN THE INDIAN OCEAN - 4500 BC

Where the Pacific was an ocean of migrants, the Indian ocean became a network of traders. How did monsoons and knowledge of the winds influence early trade in the Indian ocean?

The origin of the monsoons lies in the high air temperatures created in the Asian landmass during the summer; cooler air is drawn north-eastwards across the ocean. And then in winter it is much the opposite, as the landmass cools sharply but the ocean retains its warmth. So, between June and October winds blow favorably for shipping bound from the south-west of the ocean towards Indonesia, even if that often means sailing through thick blankets of warm rain. September to May was the period of the year when sailing from western

India to Aden proved most feasible. The discovery of how to take advantage of the winds is attributed to a Greek sailor named Hippalos in around 20 AD. He realized that it was possible to use the winds to jump right across the open space between Aden and India without having to follow the coastline of Asia, opening an express route to the riches of India to Greek merchants living in Roman Egypt.

From the fogs of Sumerian literature emerge references to the boats of the three exotic lands of Dilmun, a paradise where resided Ziusudra, the survivor of the Great Deluge; Meluhha the land of black ebony; and Magan, the land of copper, which would require sturdy defensive vessels to transport it. Were these lands mythical or is there evidence that they existed somewhere along the coast of the Indian ocean or the Persian Gulf?

As so often in the history of the oceans, myths about what lied out there preceded the actual discovery and settlement of lands across the sea. Legends existed in ancient Sumer of a paradise named Dilmun where the souls of the dead gathered: 'its dates are very large dates, its barley is very small barley'. As trade developed down the Persian Gulf towards Oman, rich in copper, and the Indus delta, giving access to the wealth of the Indus Valley civilization, a commercial settlement developed at Bahrain in the Gulf, inhabited by both Sumerians and Indians, and it too was called 'Dilmun'. This trade between Sumer and India by way of Dilmun was the first route linking two of the great Bronze Age civilizations by sea, bringing precious stones, ivory, and ebony to what is now southern Iraq.

Above Center: Reconstruction of the face of a Lapita woman. National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka | Yanajin33/CC BY SA 3.0

Right: Dilmun stamp seal with hunters and goats, rectangular pen, ca early 2nd millennium BC





Boats anchored on the sea Beach at Digha, India



At the eastern end of the Indian Ocean and in the South China Sea, the sixth and seventh centuries saw transformations that turned the spasmodic contact between lands bordering the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean into a two-way traffic lane. A trade in rhinoceros horns provides evidence of contact between China and the Western Indian Ocean. Can you expand on Chinese ventures on the ocean?

It is important to distinguish the imperial Chinese government from what the Chinese people actually did.

Generally, the imperial government treated trade with neighboring lands such as Korea, Japan, and Java as an opportunity to receive official tribute recognizing the superiority of the Chinese Empire, but plenty of private trade carried on as well, often against the rules. There were Chinese visitors to the Indian Ocean in the early Middle Ages, but much of the trade between Islamic lands, India, and China was conveyed by Arab, Jewish, Persian, Indian, and Malay merchants and navigators. In the Song period and under Mongol rule, from the late 10th century to the late 14th century, China turned to the sea. Song power was based in southern China and flourishing sea-routes were established giving access to the spices of the East Indies and enabling Chinese silk and porcelain to be exported by sea as far west as Egypt. Millions of pieces of Chinese pottery reached Cairo during the Middle Ages, and hundreds of thousands of pieces have been found on wrecks of Chinese and Javan ships excavated in recent decades. This 'Silk Route of the Sea' could carry far more goods than the well-known overland Silk Roads of the Middle Ages.

In the early Middle-Age, Śrī Vijaya flourished as a mid-point between China and India, looking in both directions and servicing the trade of both great landmasses; and in doing so it functioned both as an entrepôt where the goods of India and China could be exchanged by visiting merchants. Where was this mystical place and who were the merchants?

Based mainly in Sumatra, the kingdom of Śrī Vijaya flourished from the late seventh century AD but had passed its peak by 1225, when a Chinese geographer named Zhao Rugua reported on its impressive customs. Reports reached him of a sizeable capital city

surrounded by solid walls, ruled by a king who processed under a silk umbrella to the accompaniment of guards carrying golden lances. The king, who only bathed in rose-water, was not permitted to eat cereals, but only sago; the Śri Vijayans believed that if he did eat cereals, this would bring drought and high prices. At grand court ceremonies (assuming that his diet of sago brought him sufficient strength), the king was expected to wear a very heavy crown adorned with hundreds of jewels. The succession was decided by choosing from among his sons the one who could bear its weight on his head. In reality, the ruler did not so much control an empire, but a trading network ruled by dependent princes and allies across parts of what are now Indonesia and Malaysia. The capital, at Palembang in Sumatra, was a long snake-like town built on stilts along a river, which has left few remains. However, so long as the king had mastery over the Straits of Malacca he could tax trade passing between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, which brought Śri Vijaya great riches.

THE YOUNG OCEAN THE ATLANTIC - 22,000 BC

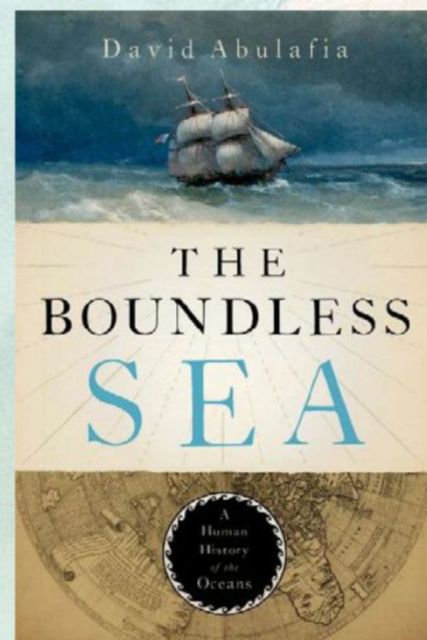
The Atlantic Ocean was more susceptible to changes in sea levels. How did the Holocene period, a temporary warm phase in the middle of a continuing Ice Age about 11,500 years ago, and the end of the Ice Age around 8,000 years ago, impact the coastline of Europe and what significance did this have for the Mesolithic people?

Much of the evidence is buried on the seabed, as the rising sea-levels that followed the melting of the ice permanently inundated coastal areas that were already inhabited by humans. A good example is the area known as Doggerland, between Britain and Scandinavia, where people lived around 8000 BC. This has now vanished beneath the waves, while the Baltic, originally a closed lake, became linked to the North Sea past Denmark. The new coastline of Europe proved welcoming to

The Boundless Sea: A Human History of the Oceans

By David Abulafia

This book traces the history of human movement and interaction around and across the world's greatest bodies of water, charting our relationship with the oceans from the time of the first voyagers. Following merchants, explorers, pirates, cartographers and travelers in their quests for spices, gold, ivory, slaves, lands for settlement and knowledge of what lay beyond, Abulafia has created an extraordinary narrative of humanity and the oceans.

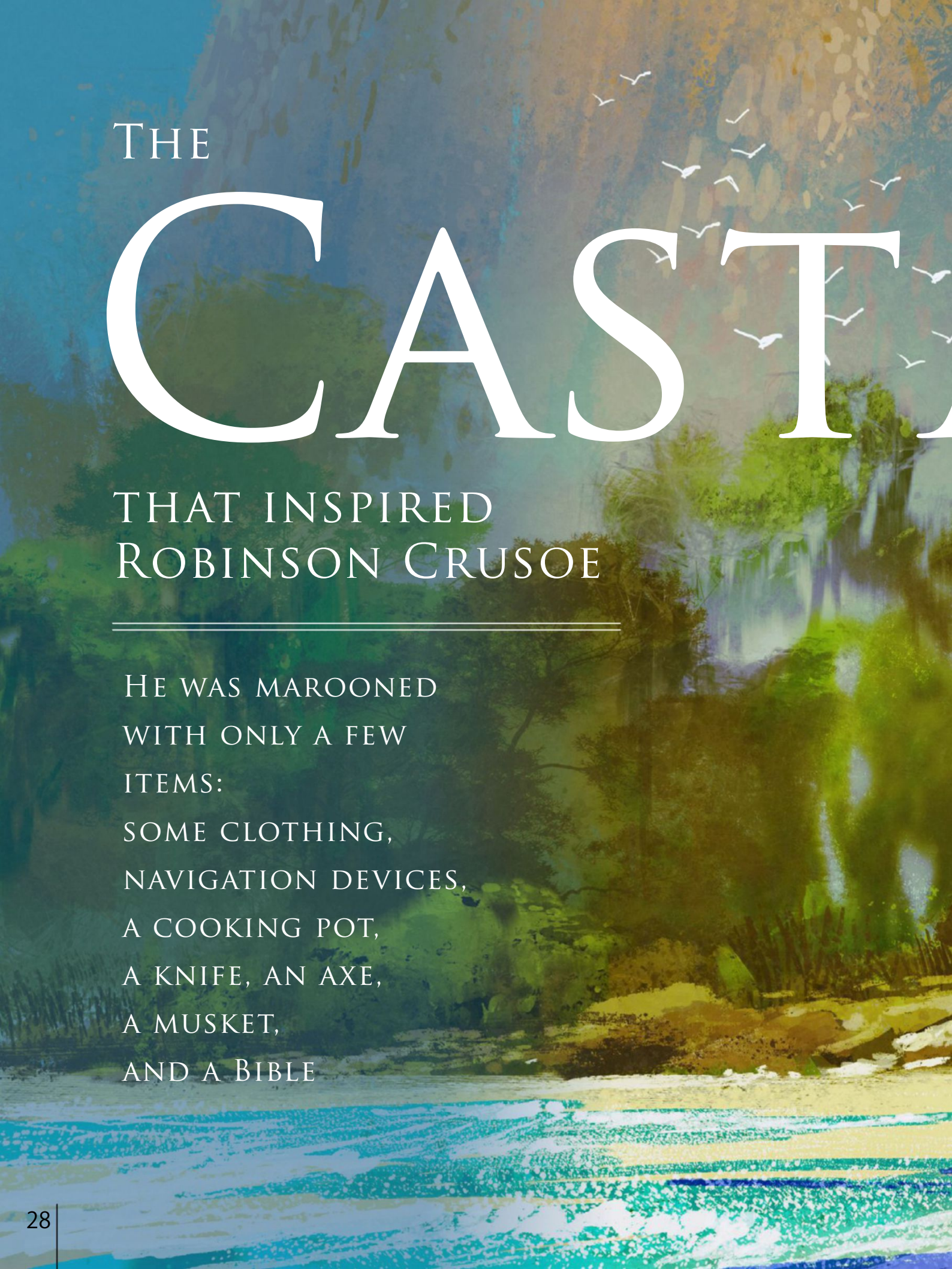


Mesolithic people looking for a diverse diet, and by about 5000 BC the shorelines were relatively densely settled – not that there were many settlers, but that the coasts attracted denser settlement than many inland areas.

Neolithic stone structures reveal a knowledge of the heavens that was surely exploited by sailors, so early Neolithic travelers must have possessed the know-how to cross tracts of the Atlantic Ocean. Can you give examples of these?

The evidence for lengthy Neolithic sea journeys is strong. Orkney contains large numbers of well-preserved Neolithic monuments from the late fourth and third millennium BC, and now that sea-levels had risen, Orkney

could only be reached across water. The islanders were learned in astronomy, and carefully aligned the monument at Maes Howe on Orkney with the solstices, indicating that sun and moon rituals were conducted here. This was not unusual – one of the greatest megalithic monuments, Newgrange in Ireland, was similarly aligned, and the decoration on its stones matches that at Maes Howe, so connections between Orkney and Ireland must have been close. These connections stretched all the way down the 'western seaways' to Brittany and Galicia, suggesting that boats traveled all the way from Britain to France and Spain, though we know little about their design. ■



THE CAST

THAT INSPIRED
ROBINSON CRUSOE

HE WAS MAROONED
WITH ONLY A FEW
ITEMS:

SOME CLOTHING,
NAVIGATION DEVICES,
A COOKING POT,
A KNIFE, AN AXE,
A MUSKET,
AND A BIBLE

AWAY

A painterly illustration of a person with a backpack walking away from the viewer on a rocky path towards a dense forest. The word 'AWAY' is written in large white serif letters across the top. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The person is wearing a dark jacket and shorts, and their backpack is visible. The path is rocky and leads into a lush, green forest with tall trees and dense foliage. The overall mood is one of solitude and adventure.

Many people would be familiar with the novel *Robinson Crusoe*, a story written by the English writer, Daniel Defoe (1660 – 1731 AD). In the novel, the eponymous character is said to have been stranded on a remote island in the Caribbean for almost 28 years. But Defoe's tale may not have been entirely fictional. Some historians have proposed that he based his work on true stories of castaways, one of them being Alexander Selkirk, a Scotsman who was also a contemporary of the writer.

Alexander Selkirk was born in Lower Largo, Fife, Scotland, in the year 1676. In 1693/5 Selkirk was summoned to the Kirk Session for 'indecent conduct in church'. He did not appear, however, as he had 'gone to sea'.

In 1703, Selkirk joined a buccaneering expedition led by the English privateer William Dampier to the South Sea. As the War of the Spanish Succession between England and France had begun only two years earlier, it was the opportune time for privateers to make a fortune and serve their country by raiding enemy vessels. On September 11 that year, the *St. George* and the *Cinque Ports* set sail from Kinsale, Ireland. Selkirk was on the latter ship, serving as sailing master.

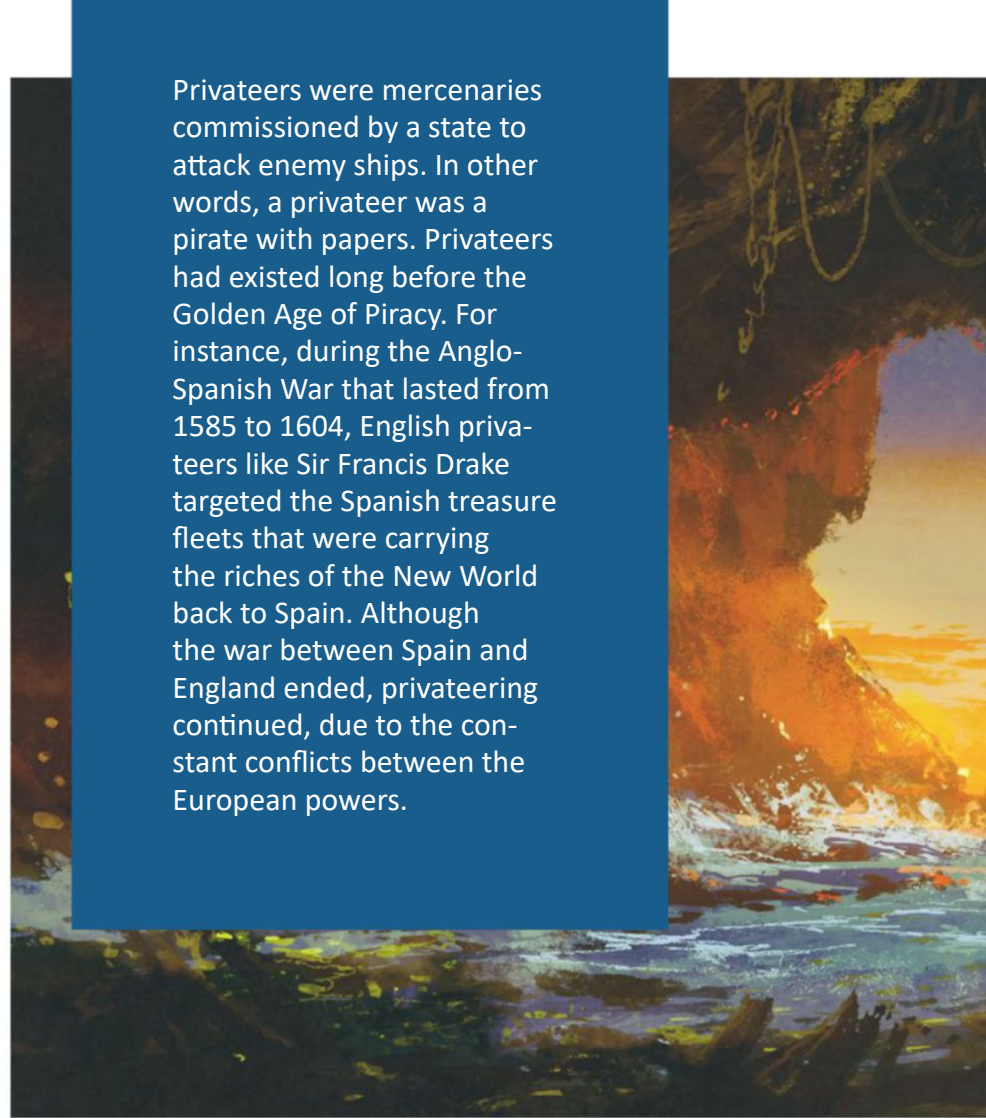
When the captain of the *Cinque Ports*, Charles Pickering, died later that year, he was replaced by Thomas Stradling, a young upper-class seaman who was not well-liked by his crew. In September, the ship had anchored at a secluded and uninhabited island off the coast of

Privateers were mercenaries commissioned by a state to attack enemy ships. In other words, a privateer was a pirate with papers. Privateers had existed long before the Golden Age of Piracy. For instance, during the Anglo-Spanish War that lasted from 1585 to 1604, English privateers like Sir Francis Drake targeted the Spanish treasure fleets that were carrying the riches of the New World back to Spain. Although the war between Spain and England ended, privateering continued, due to the constant conflicts between the European powers.

modern-day Chile. After a month of resting and restocking supplies, the *Cinque Ports* was ready to sail again. Selkirk, however, questioned the seaworthiness of the vessel and said that he would rather be left on the island than continue sailing on the *Cinque Ports*. Stradling was only too happy to comply, as the two men had not been on good terms. Thus, Selkirk was marooned on *Más a Tierra* ('Closer to Home', known today as 'Robinson Crusoe Island'), the second largest of the Juan Fernández Islands, with only a few items, including some clothing, navigation devices, a cooking pot, a knife, an axe, a musket, and a Bible.

For the next four years and four months, Selkirk would live an isolated life on the island. His fate may not have been so bad, considering the fact that his doubts about the *Cinque Ports* were proven to be right when it sank off the coast of Colombia. Only Stradling and seven other crew members survived, though they were forced to surrender to the Spanish and imprisoned.

Selkirk was able to survive on the resources he found on the island. For food, he had wild turnips, cabbages, pepper berries and feral goats, which were left behind by earlier sailors. For shelter, Selkirk made two huts of wood covered with long grass and lined with goatskin.





FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS AND FOUR MONTHS, SELKIRK WOULD LIVE AN ISOLATED LIFE ON THE ISLAND



Island in Chile where Selkirk lived for years as a castaway

10 UNDERWATER ANCIENT CITIES

- 1 **HERACLEION/ THONIS**
EGYPT (12TH CENTURY BC)
Jewelry and a ritual boat were discovered. Indications are Cleopatra's ascension and crowning took place in a local temple here.
- 2 **DWARKA**
INDIA(7500 BC)
Mythology has evil King Salva attacking Lord Krishna at Dwarka and sophisticated spacecraft were used in the battle. The ancient underwater city was discovered in the 1960s.
- 3 **PORT ROYAL**
JAMAICA (16TH CENTURY AD)
Destroyed by an earthquake and a tsunami in 1692, in its heyday it was the unofficial capital of Caribbean pirates, and notorious for its wealth and loose morals.



- 4 **RUNGHOLT**
NORTH SEA GERMANY (1362 AD)
Known as the Danish Duchy of Schleswig, it was submerged by tidal waves of a storm called 'Grote Mandreke' on the night of January 15, 1362. Legend has it as a divine punishment for the sins of its inhabitants.
- 5 **YONAGUNI JIMA**
JAPAN (UNKNOWN)
Controversy exists whether the rock formations are natural or ruins of ancient Yamatai. A pyramid, castles, roads, monuments, and a stadium could have been submerged by tectonic activity.

6 **RHAPTA**
SOUTHEAST AFRICA (UNKNOWN)

Claudius Ptolemy wrote about this Roman marketplace of ivory and tortoiseshell on the east coast of Africa. Yet to be confirmed, recent evidence points to Tanzania's island of Mafia.

7 **BAIAE**
ITALY (FIRST CENTURY AD)

Roman emperors had their villas here and it was notorious for its hedonistic offerings and the rumors of corruption and scandal.

8 **PAVLOPETRI**
GREECE (2800 BC)

A busy port in the Mediterranean at its time. Many of the underwater ruins are intact with full houses to enter and temples to visit.

9 **ATLIT YAM**
ISRAEL (7000 BC)

Human skeletons lie undisturbed in their ancient watery graves. The site boasts houses with fireplaces and a monolithic stone circle.

10 **SHI CHENG**
CHINA (SECOND CENTURY AD)

Deliberately flooded in 1959 to build a dam, this city had some of the most beautiful Chinese architecture. Divers have found statues lions, phoenixes, dragons, and ancient buildings.



When his clothes wore out, Selkirk made new ones from hair-covered goatskins. For comfort, he read the Bible. Yet, he must have yearned for human companionship and desired to escape from this loneliness.

SELKIRK RUSHED TO THE SHORE, ONLY TO HAVE HIS JOY TURN TO DESPAIR

This opportunity for rescue eventually came when two ships anchored in the island's bay. Selkirk rushed to the shore, only to have his joy turn to despair. These ships belonged to the Spanish, and if

Selkirk was caught, he would have been hanged for being a privateer serving the English. Fortunately, Selkirk managed to flee from his would-be captors, and the Spanish departed. On February 1, 1709, a second chance came when another two ships dropped anchor at the island. This time, they belonged to English privateers led by Woodes Rogers, and so Selkirk was saved.



Amazingly, the pilot of one of the ships was William Dampier, who was able to vouch for Selkirk.

Selkirk continued privateering, eventually returning to England in 1711. The following year, Woodes Rogers published a book about his privateering expedition, which included an account of Selkirk's life as a castaway. In 1719, Daniel Defoe published his novel *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist of which bore an uncanny resemblance to Selkirk.

Selkirk's fame, however, was not quite celebrated in his hometown of Lower Largo. Though a statue of him was erected in 1885 on the site of his house, it seems that not many were familiar with this local 'hero'. His notoriety prior to being a castaway probably left a stain on his reputation, and locals would rather forget than remember this character. ■



Sylvia Stanley/CC BY SA 3.0



The rescued Selkirk (seated, right) being taken aboard the Duke



Temple of Poseidon

Towering at Cape Sounion, overlooking the Aegean Sea, stands the mystical Temple of Poseidon. The temple is a landmark to the legend of King Aegeus, who waited there for his heir Theseus to return from slaying the Minotaur at Crete. On spotting the black sail of the returning ship, the king thought Theseus had died so he committed suicide by jumping from the cliffs, thereby bequeathing his name to the sea. Theseus, in his eagerness to return home had forgotten to raise the white sail, and so inadvertently caused the king's tragic demise. The current temple was built in 444 - 440 BC on the remains of a much older temple dedicated to Poseidon but destroyed during the Persian Wars in the eighth century BC.

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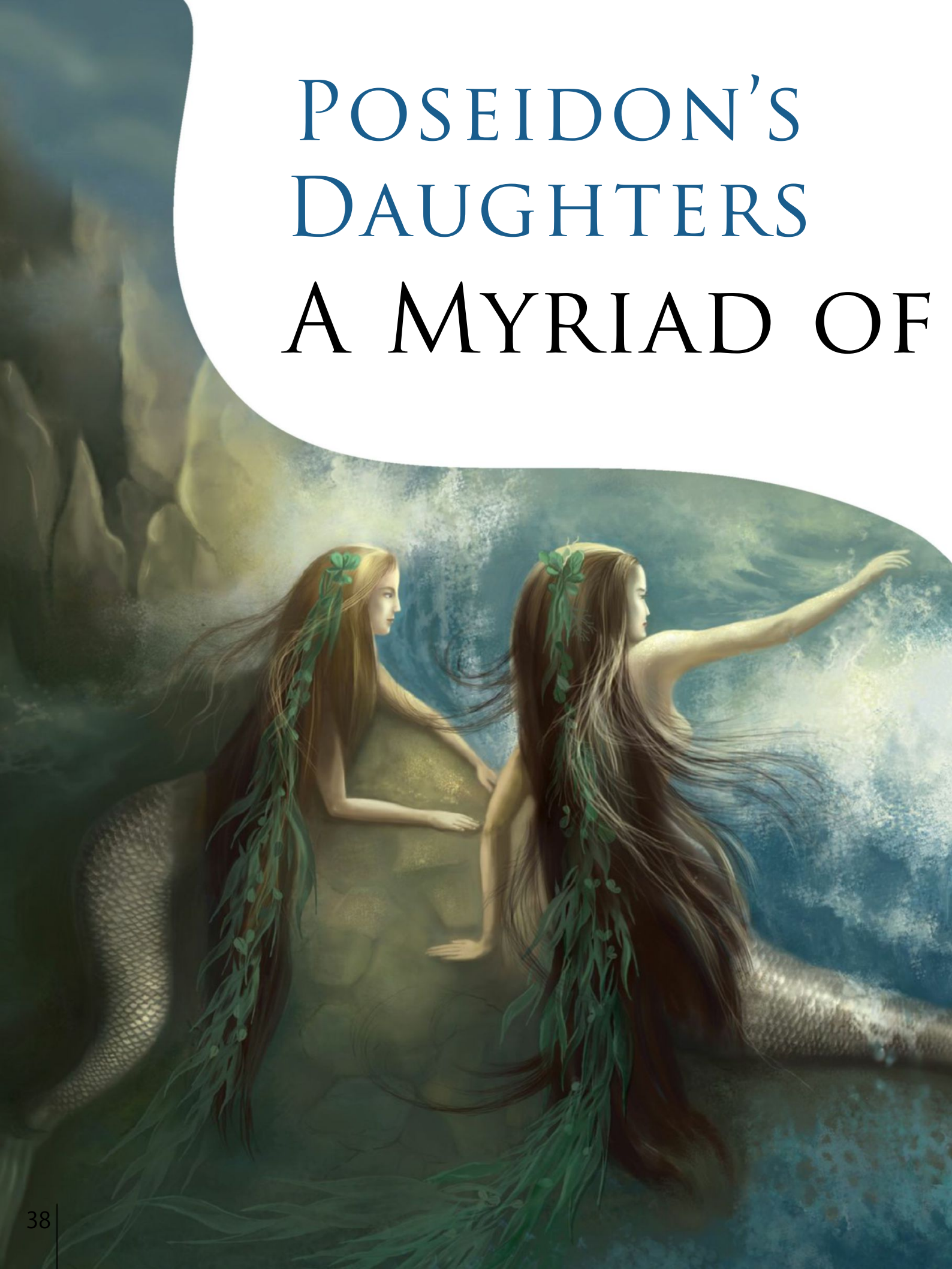


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POSEIDON'S DAUGHTERS A MYRIAD OF





MERMAIDS AND SEA MAIDENS

INTERVIEW WITH DR. NEIL RUSHTON
BY DR. MICKI PISTORIUS



A common motif in global folklore is half-human, half-fish, usually women, who lure sailors into the sea, or who become brides of humans. As always with folklore, any deeply embedded motif such as this is designed to impart some timeless wisdom; allegorical, philosophical and psychological. Universally, the fables were plugging into fundamental aspects of the human condition, as well as recording belief-systems that were disappearing in time.

Neil Rushton is an archaeologist and author who completed his Ph.D. at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. He has worked in academia and for various heritage organizations in the UK and is now a full-time author. In his spare time, he shares his research on mythological and folkloric tales through his website.



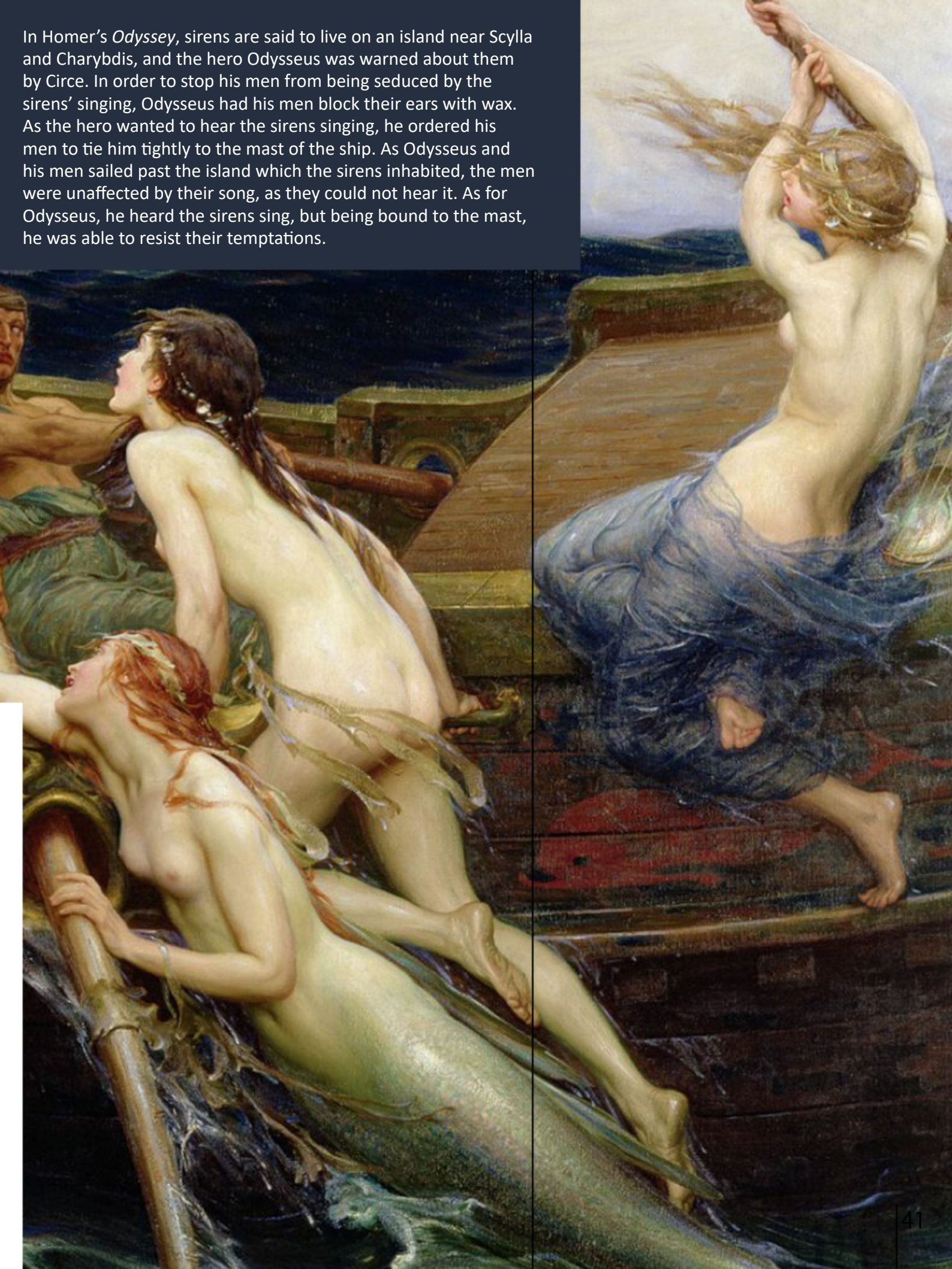
MP: *Apart from the fact that selkies, sirens, swan maidens, nereids, and mermaids all appear to be semi-aquatic, can you please explain the difference between them, focusing on their shape-shifting capabilities?*

NR: Their shapeshifting capabilities are primary, making the similarities more important than the differences. All of these entities interact with folkloric and mythological narratives through their ability to shift between water-borne creatures and human (or at least humanoid) forms. This is what ties them together as motif-types from all the stories. But each entity-form

is different and distinct, perhaps reflecting the geographic regions from which the stories come. So, for example, the folklore of selkies comes mostly from northern Scotland, especially the islands of Shetland, Orkney, and Faroe, although the theme is also found in Ireland, Scandinavia, and Iceland. The name is derived from *Selch*, the Scots Gaelic for grey seal, a species that is commonly found around the coastlines of these northern European countries. This suggests a regularly witnessed (though seldom encountered) animal was transposed into folklore in these locations - used as a real physical creature to ground the meta-

physical aspects of the stories. The selkie stories usually involve grey seals coming to landfall and then transforming into human females (occasionally males) by shedding their skins. A female is then captured by a human male before she can get back into her skin and out to sea. They usually marry, and even have children, before the call of the sea is too much and by some ruse, she escapes back to her natural domain. The stories usually have a grim denouement, such as in *The legend of Kópakonán* from the Faroe Islands, where the jilted human husband exacts revenge on the selkies, resulting in a multi-generational curse on the islanders.

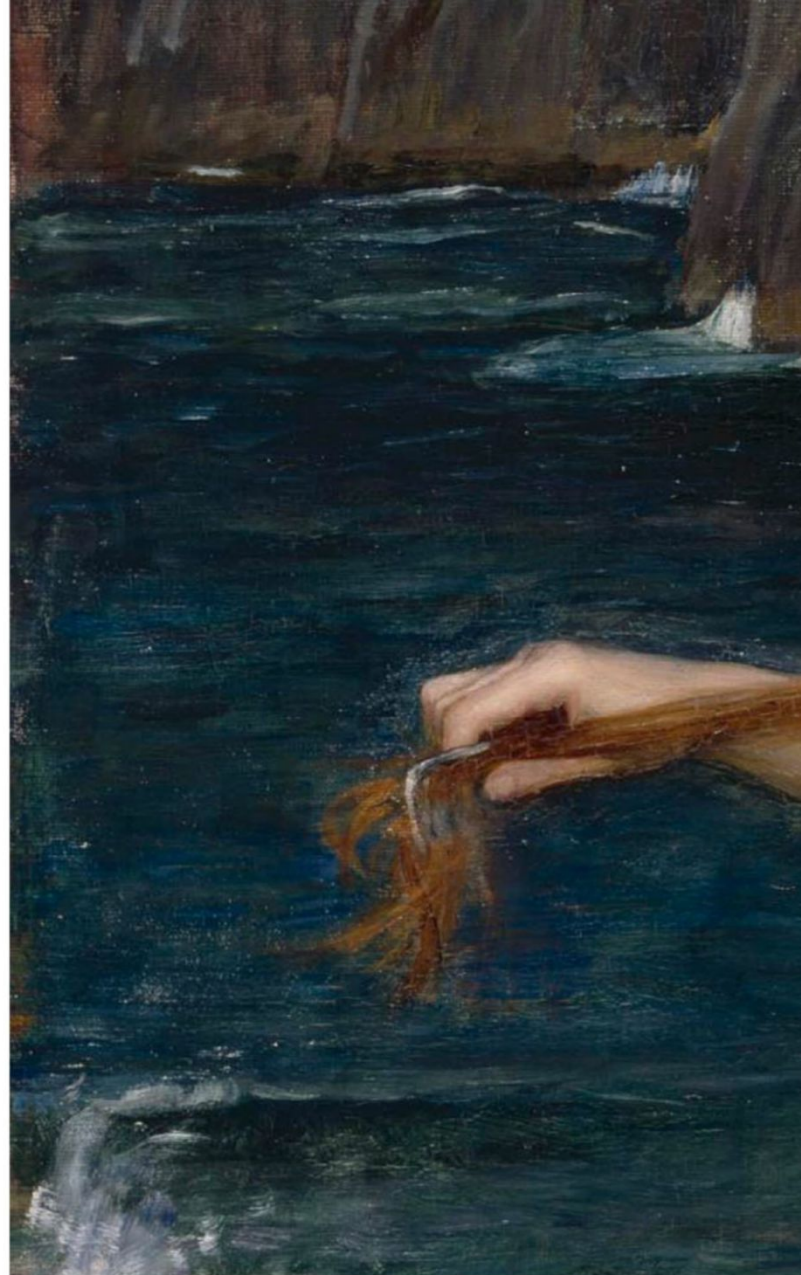
In Homer's *Odyssey*, sirens are said to live on an island near Scylla and Charybdis, and the hero Odysseus was warned about them by Circe. In order to stop his men from being seduced by the sirens' singing, Odysseus had his men block their ears with wax. As the hero wanted to hear the sirens singing, he ordered his men to tie him tightly to the mast of the ship. As Odysseus and his men sailed past the island which the sirens inhabited, the men were unaffected by their song, as they could not hear it. As for Odysseus, he heard the sirens sing, but being bound to the mast, he was able to resist their temptations.



The stories of swan-maidens take a similar form to those of the selkies—entities in the guise of swans become human, marry mortals and then return to their natural form and habitat— but these folktale motifs are predominantly found in geographical areas where there are lakes. It would appear that the folklore is place-dependent and that the animals predominant in any particular environment have been fused into a common folkloric device, where they become shapeshifters for the purposes of cosmic storytelling.

The nereids make their first appearance in Greek myth and were usually portrayed as humanoids able to shape-shift into fish in both rivers, lakes and the sea. Pliny the Elder described them in his *Natural History* (79 AD), stating the creatures could appear as fully human or as part fish, and also could be male or female. But by the Middle Ages, the term came to represent a range of nymphs and faeries. In Western Europe and Britain, one type of nereid became 'lake faeries', which were usually humanoid. But they are similar to selkies and swan-maidens in that they are able to survive in watery environs - they are evidently not quite human. However, the story motifs are the same: they are lured from their lakes, married to mortals and then return to their primary habitat after they have been wronged by the human protagonist. Once again, these stories congregate exclusively around lakes, where, under certain conditions, ambiguous phenomena might be experienced and transformed into folklore.

The entities known as mermaids (or *merrows* from Hiberno-English) seem to be closely related to the selkie, and there are collections of stories from Scotland and Ireland including similar motifs contained in the selkie tales, where the female mermaid is captured and made a wife, only to return to the sea when she is given the opportunity. However, mermaids more often than not retain their half-human half-fish form, and only a minority of the stories have them shape-shifting and marrying mortals - they are more frequently portrayed in folktales as portents of disaster at sea, sometimes even provoking it. While there are a wide variety of mermaid folktale types from all parts of the world, their representation as harbingers of catastrophe at sea is more in line with the sirens from Greek mythology than with selkies, swan-maidens, nereids, or lake faeries.



THEY ARE MORE
FREQUENTLY
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SOMETIMES EVEN
PROVOKING IT



Can you give us an overview of how these half-human, half-fish women have been a part of the global mythological ontology for thousands of years, making their first literary appearance in Assyria at about 1000 BC with the goddess Atargatis?

Although Atargatis appears in literature and iconography from this date, she is only depicted as a mermaid-type entity from a much later period. However, a water-

borne goddess was worshipped at Ascalon in Syria during the same period, which may have caused the conflation. This goddess appears as half-human, half-fish and may be the origin of mermaid mythology and folklore, which is found throughout Europe and Asia. Such Assyrian mermaid iconography made its way into Classical Greece and Rome where it begins to appear in frescoes and statuary from the fourth century BC. By this time the mermaids had lost their

goddess status but retained their supernatural powers, usually in the exercise of maleficence against sailors.

One of the earliest literary renderings of a mermaid bringing potential disaster to seafarers is found in the legend of Thessalonike, sister of Alexander the Great, who was transformed into a mermaid after her death. She would appear to sailors in the Aegean and ask them if Alexander was alive. If they answered that he was and ruled

ALL EARLY
DEPICTIONS
OF THE SIRENS
SHOW THEM
AS BIRDS WITH
WOMEN'S
HEADS



the world they would be free to continue. Any alternative answer invoked Thessalonike's wrath, she would whip up a storm and the boat would be sunk.

Homer's sirens in *The Odyssey* are likewise sea-creatures able to lure seafarers towards rocks and shipwreck through their ethereal and irresistible singing. However, all early depictions of the sirens show them as birds with women's heads, and (as with Atargatis) they only find mermaid form in

the Classical period. This might suggest the popularizing of the half-fish, half-human ontology during this time. Roman writers such as Pliny and Ovid inserted stories about mermaids into their prose, evidently expecting the reader to be familiar with them and their proclivities.

In medieval Europe the concept of the mermaid was well-established, and the iconography appears in stone reliefs, statuary, wood carvings, manuscripts, and

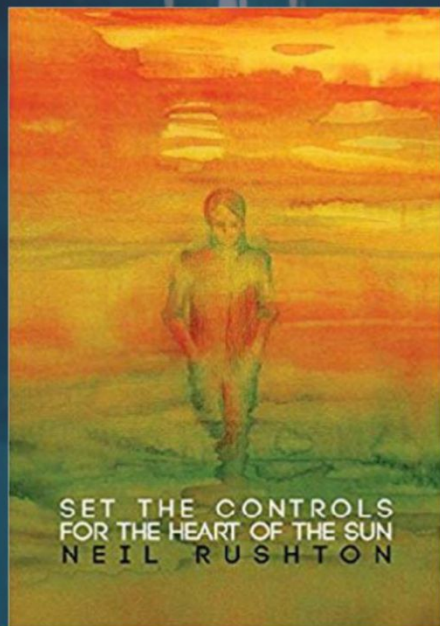
wall paintings. Their fearsome reputation as ship-wreckers had diminished somewhat by this time and their presence in literature often uses them as a Christian morality tale to warn of seduction by such vain shapeshifting women. However, their ability to warn of disasters at sea, or cause them, was retained in folklore through to the 19th century, meaning their phenomenology has remained intact for well over 2,000 years.



THE ASIAN
MERMAIDS
TEND TO
BE LESS
MALEVOLENT
THAN THEIR
EUROPEAN
COUNTERPARTS



Mermaid statue on the island of Koh Samet, Thailand.
Characters from Phra Aphai Mani, an epic written by the Thai
legendary poet, Sunthorn Phu, 1822



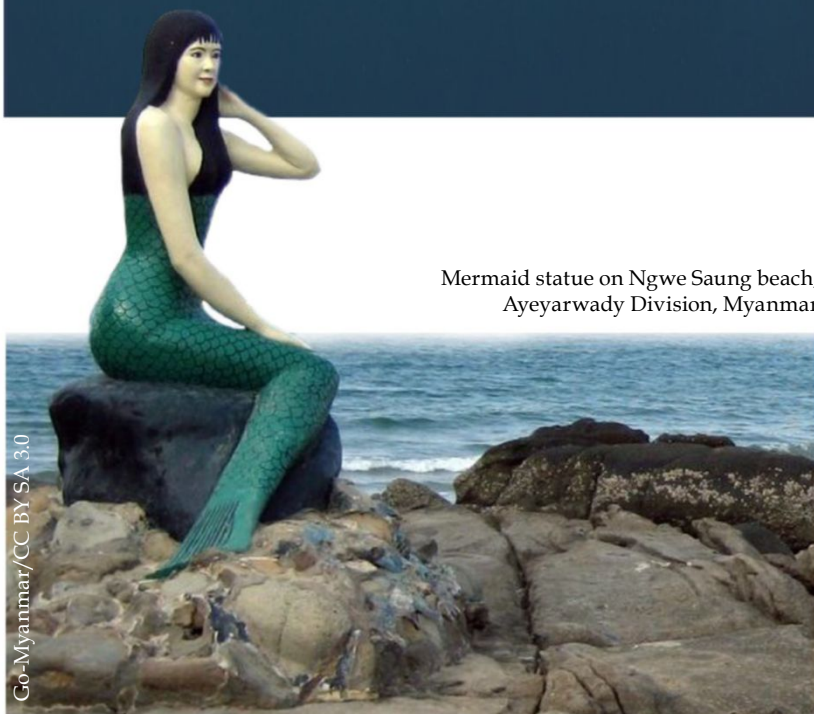
Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun

By Neil Rushton

An unnerving and unusual story about one man's struggle to overcome perceived mental illness with the use of psychedelic drugs. Fantasy and reality intertwine leaving the reader never quite certain whether the author is recounting a hallucinogenic trip, a dream sequence, or something else altogether. A compelling, sometimes uncomfortable, but never dull read, it will leave the reader knowing a little more about themselves and the mysteries of the human mind. | Get it on Amazon

Neil's website is DeadButDreaming.wordpress.com

Mermaid statue on Ngwe Saung beach,
Ayeyarwady Division, Myanmar



The mermaid tradition has also found form globally. Although it is uncertain whether all mermaid types were originally generated from Assyria, the ontology of these beings does appear to have some sort of universal lineage. The *ningyo* from Japan, the *sirena* (etymologically similar to the Greek sirens) and *siyokoy* from the Philippines and the 'sea women' from China are all part-female-human, part-fish. The Asian mermaids tend to be less malevolent than their European counterparts (although not always) but the iconography and written descriptions (which mostly do not occur until the 15th and 16th centuries) are very similar and do suggest a common baseline.

The other water-borne entities have a different folkloric role to play. As discussed above, shapeshifters such as swan maidens, selkies, and lake faeries may have been part of an oral tradition from the prehistoric period, but they only find form in literary tradition from the 16th century. Their role is as metaphysical beings who interact with mortals, usually with an allegorical moral about love. This appears to have been first codified by the 16th-century alchemist Paracelsus, who in his treatise *Liber de Nymphis* (1566) termed the supernatural water entities *Undines* and suggested they could gain immortal souls by marrying and procreating with human males. Variations on this theme make up the later folklore, most of which was collected and classified during the 19th and early 20th centuries. So, through time, although we see a commonality between all these beings whose ultimate home is the water (sea, lake or river), their characteristics and provenances also show much divergence.

You state they share a common attribute in that they are all entities from a metaphysical other-world, interacting with consensus reality in order to bridge the gap between the natural and the supernatural. Why do you consider water as the portal between the physical world and a non-material reality?

This may depend on where these stories were generated. Many of them come from Celtic areas of Britain and the European mainland.

There is much archaeological evidence of 'water cults' in these areas during the prehistoric period (specifically the late Bronze Age and Iron Age), most often in the form of valuable metal objects, which were deposited in bodies of water for some ritual purpose.

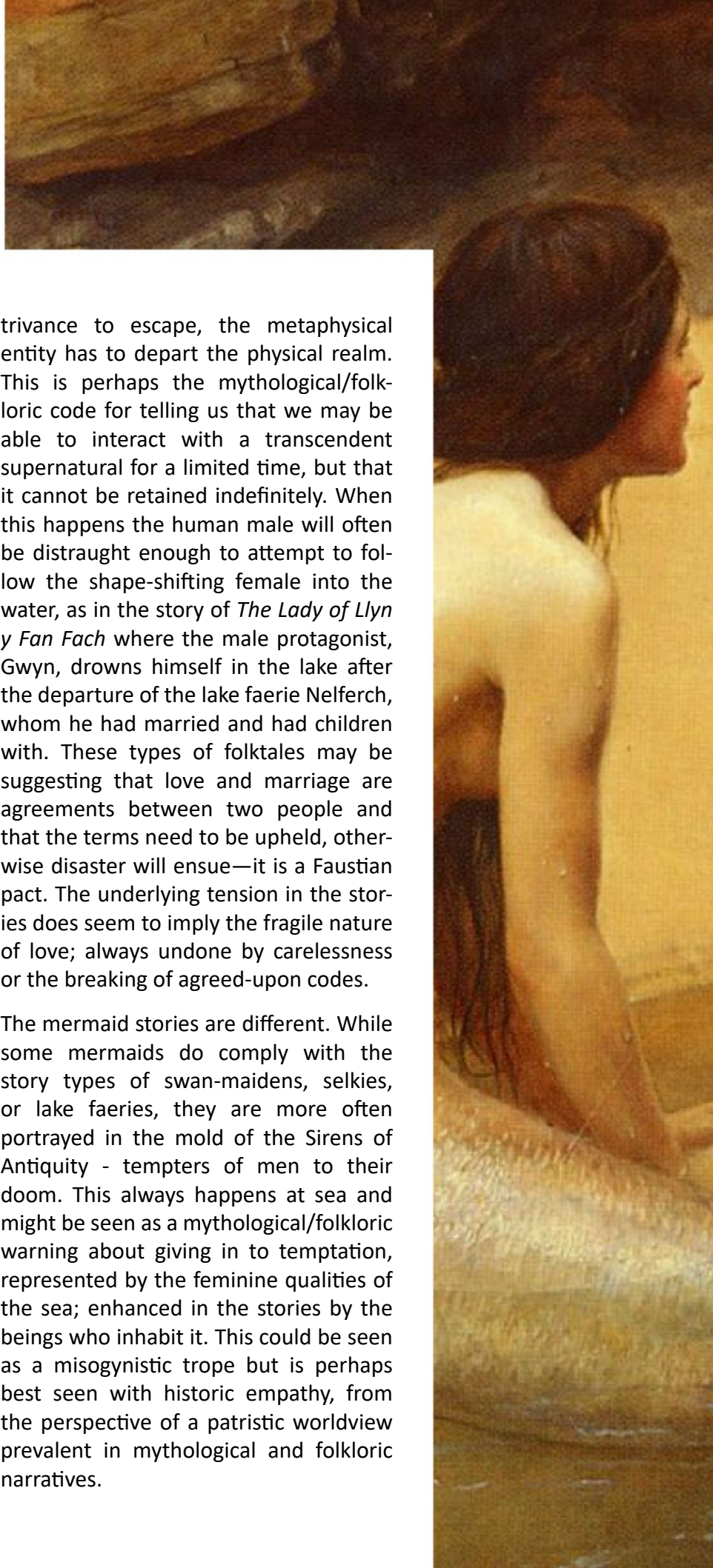
This suggests a particular reverence for water and the potential for lakes, rivers, and the sea to contain, or to symbolize divine entities. So, the various beings may represent diminished ancient goddesses or spirits - Celtic deities dwelling in sacred bodies of water and requiring some type of sacrifice or oblation as propitiation, which has become transformed over time into the interaction of mortals with supernatural water entities in the folktales. This would require the geneses of the stories to be prehistoric, passed on over millennia through an oral tradition. Another explanation is that the bodies of water represent *the unknown* and are therefore an easy place for the creators of these stories to place supernatural entities. This correlates with the myriad of folktales about the faeries living underground (most often in prehistoric burial mounds) - another place usually inaccessible. Metaphysical entities cannot permanently reside in above-ground consensus reality like humans, and so need to be located somewhere mysterious and beyond our reach. So, the surface of the water (where the entities always first appear to the story protagonists) is the interface between our world and the supernatural otherworld. The water becomes a trope - a codified signal in the stories to separate the physical from the metaphysical.

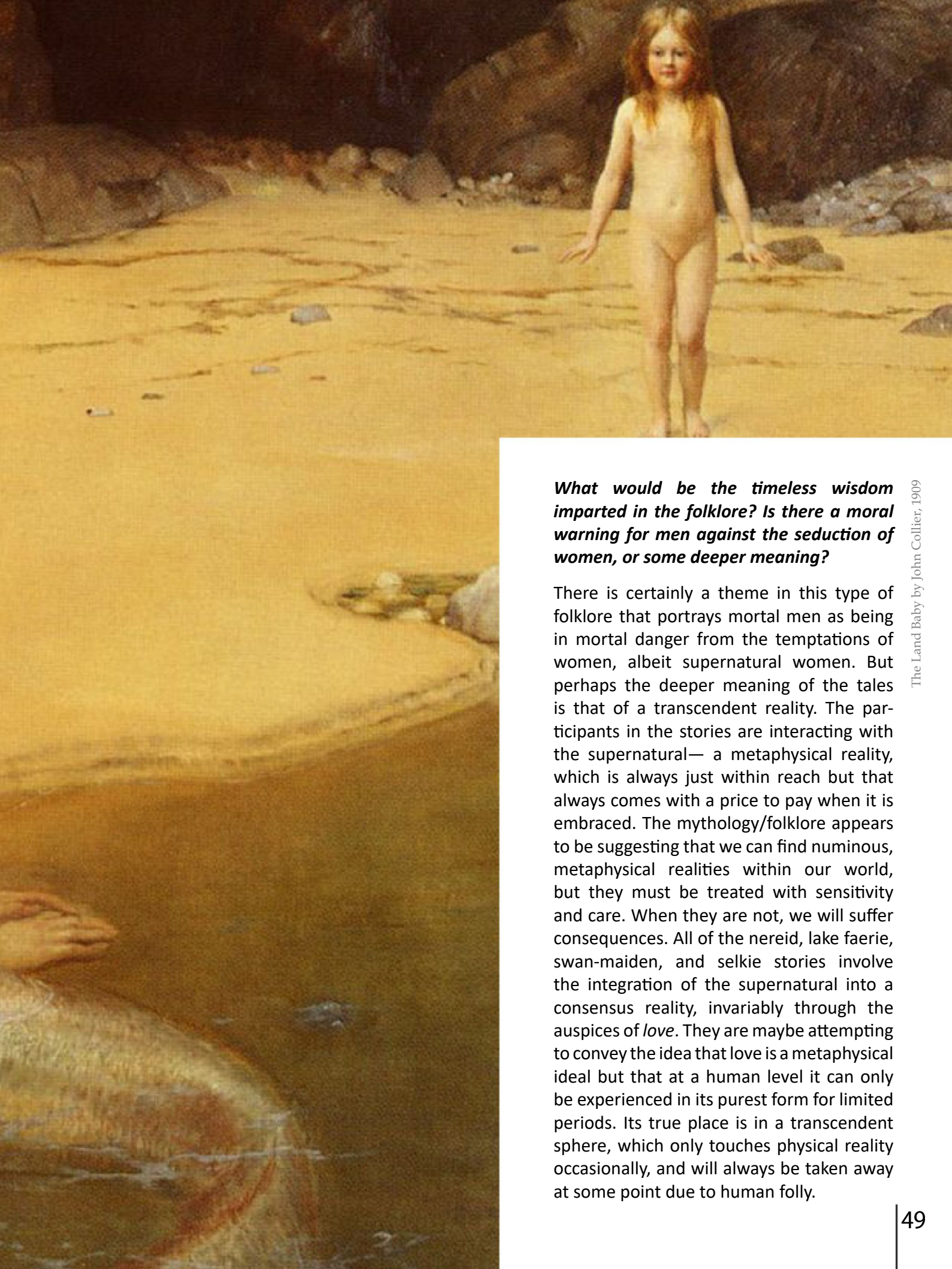
In folklore, there is either the theme of the female being lured into the physical world by the male, or the female luring the male to the non-material world. The female can survive in 'human' form, but do the men survive or are they drowned, as sailors believed? What relevance would that have for the Faustian pact?

The supernatural females do indeed survive in the physical world once they have been convinced/lured to be a part of it. But it *never* lasts. At some point, either through an accidental breaking of a taboo or through the female's con-

trivance to escape, the metaphysical entity has to depart the physical realm. This is perhaps the mythological/folkloric code for telling us that we may be able to interact with a transcendent supernatural for a limited time, but that it cannot be retained indefinitely. When this happens the human male will often be distraught enough to attempt to follow the shape-shifting female into the water, as in the story of *The Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach* where the male protagonist, Gwyn, drowns himself in the lake after the departure of the lake faerie Nelferch, whom he had married and had children with. These types of folktales may be suggesting that love and marriage are agreements between two people and that the terms need to be upheld, otherwise disaster will ensue—it is a Faustian pact. The underlying tension in the stories does seem to imply the fragile nature of love; always undone by carelessness or the breaking of agreed-upon codes.

The mermaid stories are different. While some mermaids do comply with the story types of swan-maidens, selkies, or lake faeries, they are more often portrayed in the mold of the Sirens of Antiquity - tempters of men to their doom. This always happens at sea and might be seen as a mythological/folkloric warning about giving in to temptation, represented by the feminine qualities of the sea; enhanced in the stories by the beings who inhabit it. This could be seen as a misogynistic trope but is perhaps best seen with historic empathy, from the perspective of a patristic worldview prevalent in mythological and folkloric narratives.





What would be the timeless wisdom imparted in the folklore? Is there a moral warning for men against the seduction of women, or some deeper meaning?

There is certainly a theme in this type of folklore that portrays mortal men as being in mortal danger from the temptations of women, albeit supernatural women. But perhaps the deeper meaning of the tales is that of a transcendent reality. The participants in the stories are interacting with the supernatural— a metaphysical reality, which is always just within reach but that always comes with a price to pay when it is embraced. The mythology/folklore appears to be suggesting that we can find numinous, metaphysical realities within our world, but they must be treated with sensitivity and care. When they are not, we will suffer consequences. All of the nereid, lake faerie, swan-maiden, and selkie stories involve the integration of the supernatural into a consensus reality, invariably through the auspices of *love*. They are maybe attempting to convey the idea that love is a metaphysical ideal but that at a human level it can only be experienced in its purest form for limited periods. Its true place is in a transcendent sphere, which only touches physical reality occasionally, and will always be taken away at some point due to human folly.

The Land Baby by John Collier, 1909



“Pause with your ship; listen to our song. Never has nay man passed this way in his dark vessel and left unheard the honey-sweet music from our lips” (Odyssey Book XII) warns Odysseus to resist the lure of the voices of the sirens. What role does music and song play in these mythologies?

The mythology of the sirens contains the most explicit reference to music and song being an intrinsic part of the repertoire of sea-borne supernatural beings. The basic premise was that their choral voices were so alluring that no sailor could resist steering his ship towards them even if that meant wrecking his ship upon the rocks (a trait shared in some stories of the sirenas from the Philippines).

Mermaids are also occasionally portrayed with pipes or flutes with the insinuation that their warnings of disasters at sea were conveyed by music. But otherwise, the folklore and mythology of these water entities do not include song or

music as a component of the stories. This may be another reason to set apart aspects of the Greek mythological cycles from later Western European (and Asian) folklore. While there are evident similarities, the main lines of influence appear to be separate.

Why would an ancient, folkloric, but non-Biblical, character such as a mermaid find its way into so many medieval European churches?

There are many representations of mermaids in medieval churches. They find their way into wall paintings, sculptures and bench-ends, which would have been in constant view, and touching distance, of the congregations. The majority of these mermaids are portrayed with symbols that would have been understood as displaying attributes of the sins of pride and vanity; the mermaids often held combs and mirrors. Not only were the mermaids sexual temptresses, but they were also made explicit in their van-

ity. This may have allowed for a dual meaning in their symbology, where the mermaids' known tendency to draw men to their destruction was coupled with a warning to women to guard against excessive vanity. The depiction of the mermaids with long flowing hair also fed into this; medieval women of good virtue were expected to wear their hair 'tamed' and concealed beneath a covering; loose hair was for pre-pubescent girls and virtueless women. It might be wondered whether such portrayals of alluring femininity in churches may have had the opposite effect of that intended, but it seems as if the Christian ecclesiastical authorities were able to use effectively the symbology of the mermaid, known for destruction and misfortune, to inculcate Christian virtues. It is unlikely that mermaid iconography would have been so regularly displayed in such prominent positions in churches if this were not the case. ■

UNTWISTING THE KNOTTED HISTORY OF SEA WITCHES

BY ASHLEY COWIE

Sea witches regularly appeared in ancient mythological systems as sinister spell workers who maintained magical bonds with the sea, the weather, and of seafaring coastal life.

In Norse myths, sea witches were most often portrayed as magical, malevolent spirits. They were always female and their perceived magical influence over the sea and tides was believed to have come from their worship, and sacred bond with, the moon. Lunar goddesses all over the world were worshiped in triple aspects: virgin, mother, and crone, representing the three phases of the monthly lunar cycle: waxing, full, and waning. Sea witches were believed to twist their lunar sorcery into magic strings and ropes, most often with three knots, which were sold to superstitious mariners to help them control the elements.

All over the world the knot served as containers for magic and as one was tied, the witches' intention or spell was 'bound to the cord'. In Norwegian traditions, knot magic was used in healing spells to bind pain or inflammation temporarily, offering relief to the patient while being moved or fed. In the famous story of the Gordian Knot, Alexander the Great untied (or cut) the "untie-able knot" releasing its king-making power and the Knot of Heracles (the reef knot) was said to have "great healing powers"; bandages on wounds tied with this knot were believed to heal faster.

Magical mechanics of sea witches' knots differed from place to place, but everywhere, the knots were believed to contain the energy to create different types of wind. The first knot might release a gentle, south-easterly wind, while pulling the third knot might unleash a hurricane. ■



LOST CREW: THE MYSTERY OF THE MARY CELESTE

The *Mary Celeste* was a merchant brigantine that was launched under British registration in 1861 as *Amazon*. Seven years later, she was transferred to American ownership and was re-christened as the *Mary Celeste*. The ship continued to sail uneventfully until her 1872 voyage from New York to Genoa. The ship's captain was Benjamin Briggs, a man said to be a staunch abstainer from alcohol and a devout Christian.

Towards the end of October 1872, the loading of the ship's cargo, 1701 barrels of poisonous denatured alcohol, began. On November 7, the *Mary Celeste* left New York Harbor and sailed into the Atlantic. On December 4, the British brigantine *Dei Gratia* discovered the *Mary Celeste* sailing aimlessly between the Azores and Portugal. Upon closer inspection, the crew of the *Dei Gratia* discovered that there was no one on board the *Mary Celeste*, and the last entry in the ship's daily log was written on November 24. In spite of this, the ship was still in seaworthy condition, her cargo still largely intact, and her food and water supply sufficient for six months. Captain Briggs, described as a brave officer who would not abandon his ship unless to save his life, the first mate, Albert Richardson, also considered fit to command, as well as Captain Briggs's wife, his infant daughter, and six other crew members had completely disappeared from the ship.

The fact that the crew had left their pipes for smoking behind indicated to Captain David Morehouse of the *Dei Gratia* that the crew had left the ship in a panic. Moreover, the ship's single lifeboat, as well as her chronometer and sextant, were missing. It was also later revealed during the cross-examination of a seaman of the *Dei Gratia* that the main halyard, a sturdy rope, was found



The Missing Crew
of the *Mary Celeste*.
Benjamin Briggs,
Captain



Albert C. Richardson,
First mate



Sarah Briggs, wife
of Benjamin Briggs



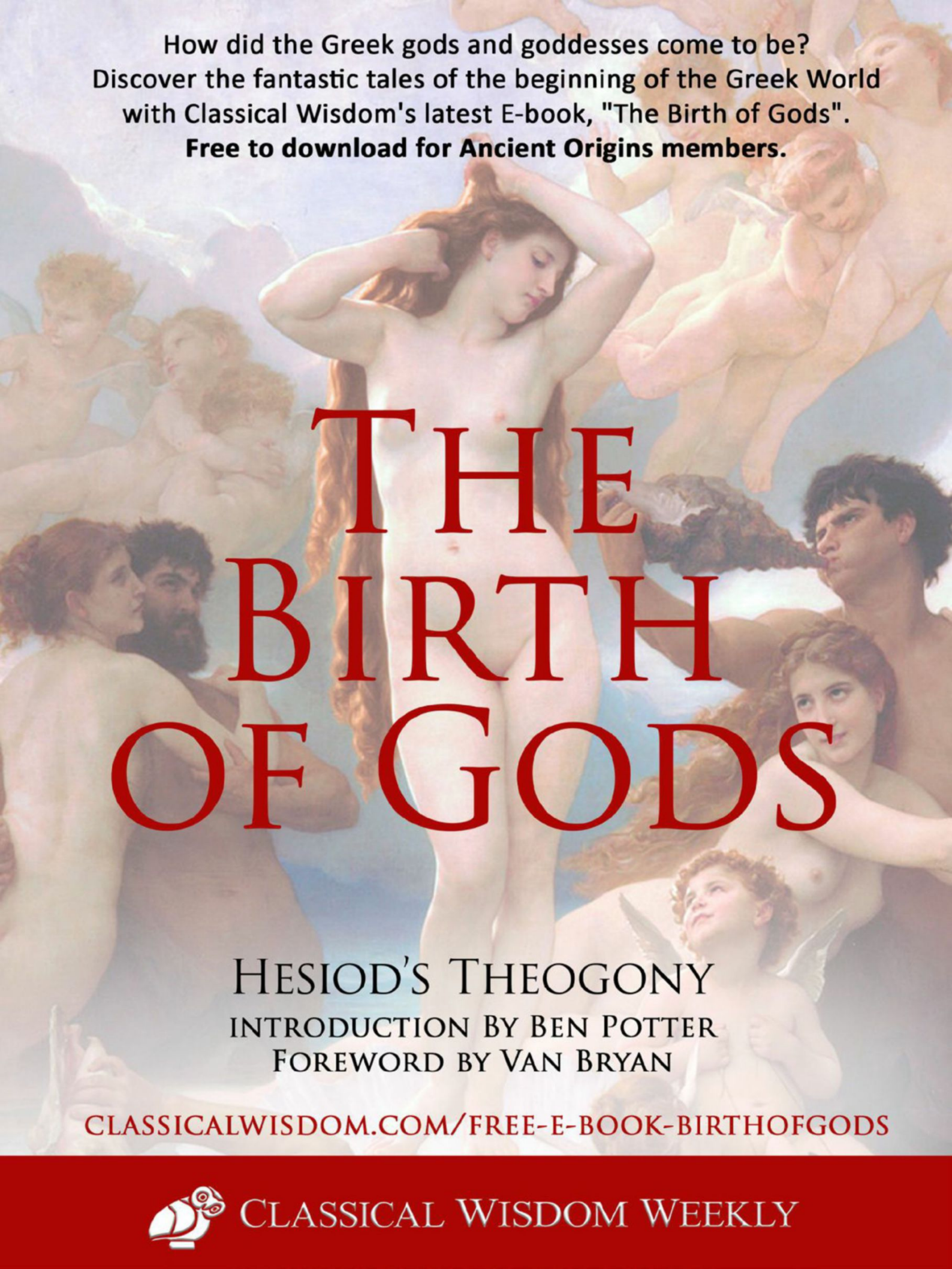
Sophia Briggs,
daughter of
Benjamin and Sarah
Briggs

to be broken and hanging over the side of the *Mary Celeste*. From these bits of evidence, a possible scenario may be pieced together: Something happened on the *Mary Celeste* that made the captain panic, and he ordered the crew to get into the lifeboat and abandon ship. The halyard was used and then tied to the lifeboat, and the captain and his crew trailed behind the *Mary Celeste* to see what would happen to her. The panic turned out to be a false alarm. Unfortunately for Captain Briggs, his family and crew, the halyard snapped during the raging storm, and they were unable to get themselves back to the *Mary Celeste*.

Less plausible suggestions have been death by giant octopus or squid, or that the crew came upon a derelict ship containing treasure and deserted the *Mary Celeste*, and were living happily ever after in Spain. ■



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THE BIRTH OF GODS

HESIOD'S THEOGONY
INTRODUCTION BY BEN POTTER
FOREWORD BY VAN BRYAN

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PIRATES

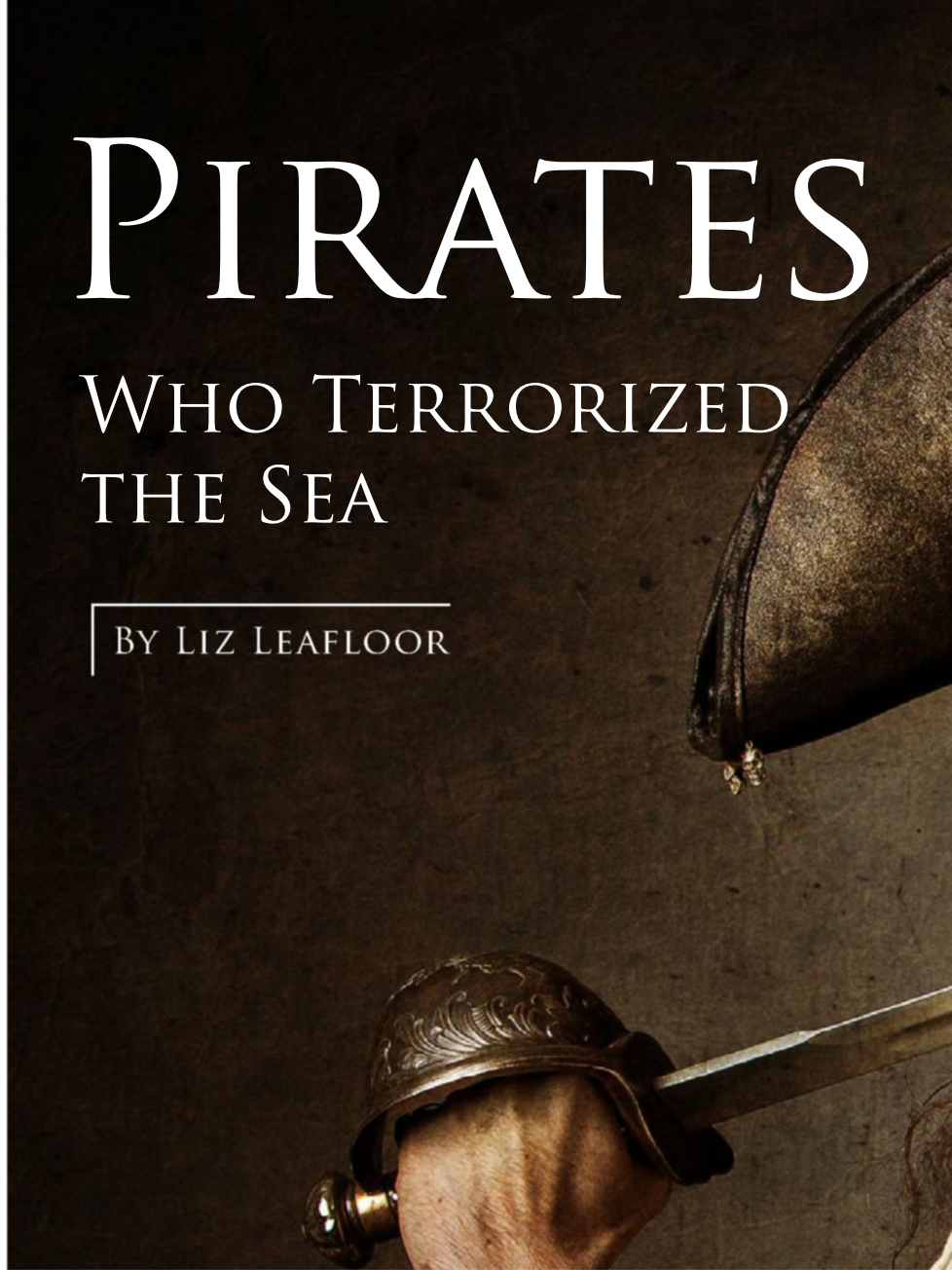
WHO TERRORIZED THE SEA

BY LIZ LEAFLOOR

There was a Golden Age of Piracy, and that's not just figurative. It was literally true – men and women made untold fortunes of gold, silver, jewels, and goods while riding the high seas and bringing their foes low... often down to the depths of Davey Jones' locker.

Be they buccaneers, privateers, corsairs, freedom fighters, or just murderous thieves, one thing's for sure – they burned brightly for a short time, and their remarkable (and sometimes savage) lives are now the stuff of legends.

Here are 10 pirates who terrorized the seas.



CAPTAIN MORGAN: DRINKING IN SUCCESS

WELSH
1635-1688

Captain Morgan is now a well-known brand of rum, but the man behind the booze is perhaps the most famous pirate of the buccaneering era. Henry Morgan's early life is unknown, but most historians agree that he was born into a farming family in south Wales. Mystery also surrounds the career path which led him to become a

legendary privateer, but nevertheless he ended up terrorizing Spain's Caribbean colonies in the late 1600s. Henry Morgan once purportedly ordered his men to lock the villagers of Puerto Príncipe, Cuba, inside a church so they could plunder the town unhindered. His greatest achievement was capturing the wealthy Panama City with

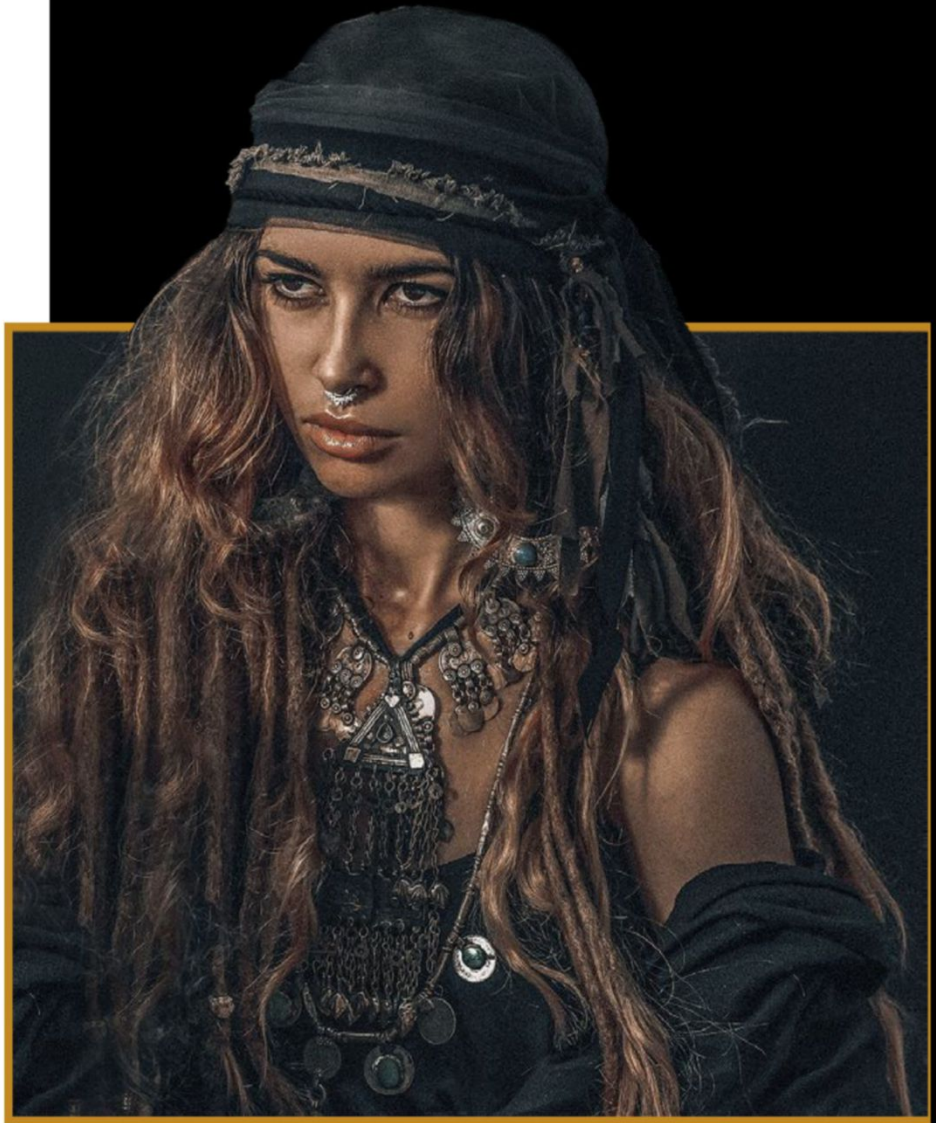
30 ships and 1200 men. Morgan subsequently earned the name *El Diablo*, for he set the Caribbean alight in his quest for gold, silver, and jewels. He was briefly arrested in 1672, was knighted in England, and served as Governor of Jamaica, living respectfully until his death, age 53.



SAYYIDA AL-HURRA: BOWED TO NO ONE

IBERIAN
1515-1561

Sayyida al-Hurra was a notorious female pirate who lived between the 15th and 16th centuries. Her father was a tribal chief, and her mother was a Christian who converted to Islam. As the child of a nobleman, Sayyida al-Hurra was provided with an excellent education, being tutored in such subjects as mathematics, theology, and languages. The title *Sayyida al Hurra* means "noble lady who is free and independent; the woman sovereign who bows to no superior authority." At some point, she became a pirate. Some have speculated that she never forgot the fall of Granada and vowed to avenge this loss, as well as to retake Andalusia from the Christians. Although she was not able to take the Spanish and Portuguese head-on, she instead wreaked havoc on their sea trade via piracy. In time, she formed an alliance with the infamous pirate Oruç Reis (one of Redbeard's brothers). Although she was hated by her European enemies, her fall from power wasn't from outsiders but was an inside job. She was overthrown by her son-in-law and stripped of property and power.



SHE NEVER FORGOT
THE FALL OF
GRANADA AND
VOWED TO AVENGE
THIS LOSS



L'OLONNAIS THE CRUEL: FLAIL OF THE SPANISH

FRENCH
1660 – 1669

François l'Olonnais is considered one of the cruelest and blood-thirsty pirates of all eras. His real name remains a mystery, but it's believed he began as a poor man, working on a plantation in America as an indentured servant. He escaped and became a buccaneer. During this period, he succeeded in establishing a fearsome reputation for himself, which is echoed even to this day. He is still often considered to be one of the most ruthless and barbaric pirates to have lived. The Spanish were often the victims

of his cruelty, so he earned the nickname 'Flail of the Spanish'. He would mercilessly kill everyone on board the ships he captured, tear out the tongues of prisoners, and is said to have eaten a Spanish soldier's heart during one of his many attacks. His own death was, therefore, poetic justice. l'Olonnais and crew were shipwrecked on a sandbar off Panama. As they ventured onto land in search of food and water, a local tribe captured them and devoured them.

BLACK BELLAMY: ROBIN HOOD OF PIRATES?

ENGLISH
1716 - 1717

The notorious pirate “Black Sam” Bellamy sailed the seven seas, plundering and pirating, becoming the richest buccaneer ever known. He was born in Devonshire, England, and in his late teens, he joined the British navy and fought in several battles. In 1716, after a mutiny aboard a ship, he was named the new captain, and during just one year they robbed more than 50 ships in the Atlantic and the Caribbean, accumulating the equivalent to \$120 million in

today’s money, making him the richest pirate ever. Bellamy was also famous for his expensive clothes, especially black coats. As a captain, he was almost democratic, and the crew liked to call him “Pirate Robin Hood.” But this was no storybook ending – his pirate career was short-lived. In 1717 he and his crew drowned when their ship was wrecked, and the 102 lost souls have recently been found buried in a secret location in Massachusetts. He was 28.



Rambol01/CC BY SA 3.0

SIR FRANCIS DRAKE: PIRATE FOR EMPIRE

ENGLISH
1540-1595



Francis Drake knighted in Deptford by Queen Elizabeth I, April 4, 1581

Known as “my pirate” by Queen Elizabeth I, Francis Drake was a privateer (licensed pirate) for the English government. He sacked the Spanish army – his greatest foe – many times, and relentlessly plundered Spanish cities off the coast of Florida. He sailed his most famous voyage in 1577 and became the first English captain to circumnavigate the globe, while raiding ports and Spanish vessels loaded with treasure along the way. Queen Elizabeth knighted him immediately upon his return. He even rescued the failed English colonists of Roanoke Island off the coast of the Carolinas and brought them back to England. On top of that, he helped defeat the Spanish Armada. He survived all these adventures, and something as mundane as dysentery brought down this master privateer, killing him at 55.

GRACE O'MALLEY: THE IRISH ROVER

IRISH
1564 – 1603

Grace O'Malley was born in Ireland around 1530, the daughter of a wealthy nobleman and sea trader. Upon his death, she inherited his large shipping and trading business. From her earliest days, she rejected the role of the 16th-century woman, instead embracing the life on the sea with the fleet of trading ships. The income from this business, as well as land inherited from her mother, enabled her to become rich and politically

powerful. Grace commanded hundreds of men and some 20 ships in raids on rival clans and merchant ships. She also ran afoul of government officials, who made repeated attempts to curb her activity. At the age of 56, Grace O'Malley was finally captured, but she petitioned the Queen of England and successfully convinced her to release her and her family. She most likely died at Rockfleet Castle around 1603.

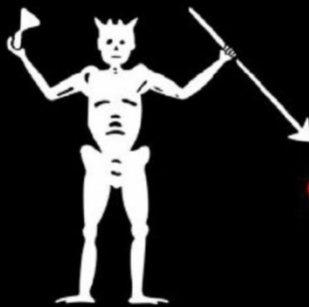


FROM HER EARLIEST
DAYS, SHE REJECTED
THE ROLE OF THE
16TH-CENTURY
WOMAN, INSTEAD
EMBRACING
THE LIFE
ON THE SEA

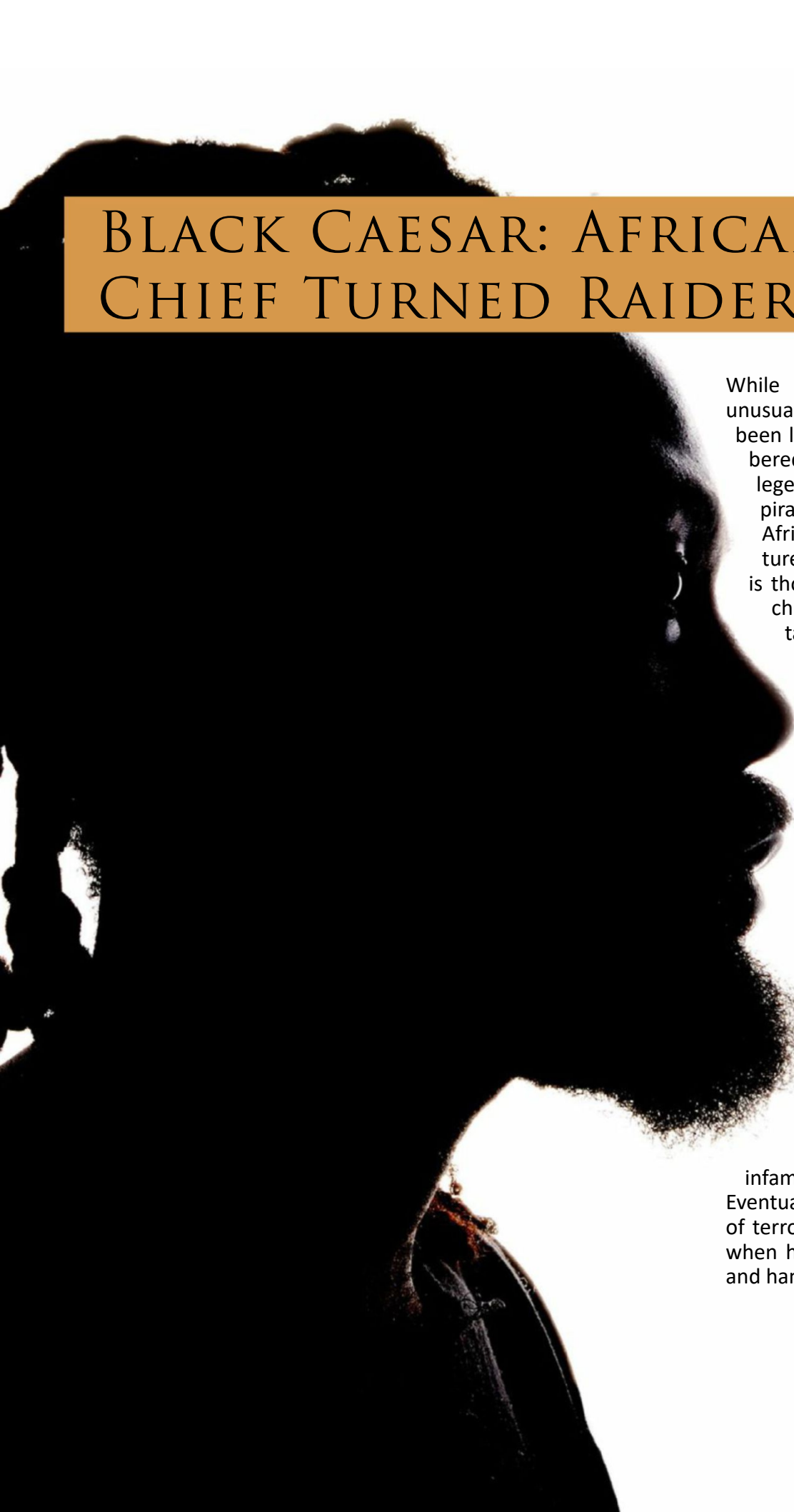
BLACKBEARD: WILD MAN OF THE SEA

ENGLISH
1680- 1718

There have been more successful pirates, but hardly more well-known, even in modern times. Born Edward Teach, Blackbeard intimidated enemies by barreling into battle with a wild persona; coiling smoking fuses into his long, braided beard, strapping multiple pistols and daggers across his chest, while clutching two swords. Capturing over 40 merchant ships in the Caribbean, he killed many prisoners and took many unofficial wives – one, a 16-year-old, he offered as a gift to his crew after she tried to reform him. He was finally captured and beheaded by the Royal Navy, his head raised upon a stake as a warning to other pirates off Virginia. He was approximately 35. Blackbeard was a central force during the 'Golden Age of Piracy', and books, plays, and movies would romanticize his story right up until today; including the now-iconic character Captain Jack Sparrow in *Pirates of the Caribbean*.



Teach was known to use black flags with death heads and "bloody flags" which were meant to intimidate one's enemies. This one depicts a skeleton spearing a heart, while toasting the devil



BLACK CAESAR: AFRICAN CHIEF TURNED RAIDER

WEST AFRICAN
1700S - 1718

While black pirates were not unusual, many of their names have been lost to history. One remembered today is Black Caesar, a legendary 18th-century African pirate. Originally from West Africa, Black Caesar was captured and sold into slavery. It is thought he may have been a chief. He is said to have been tall, strong, and intelligent.

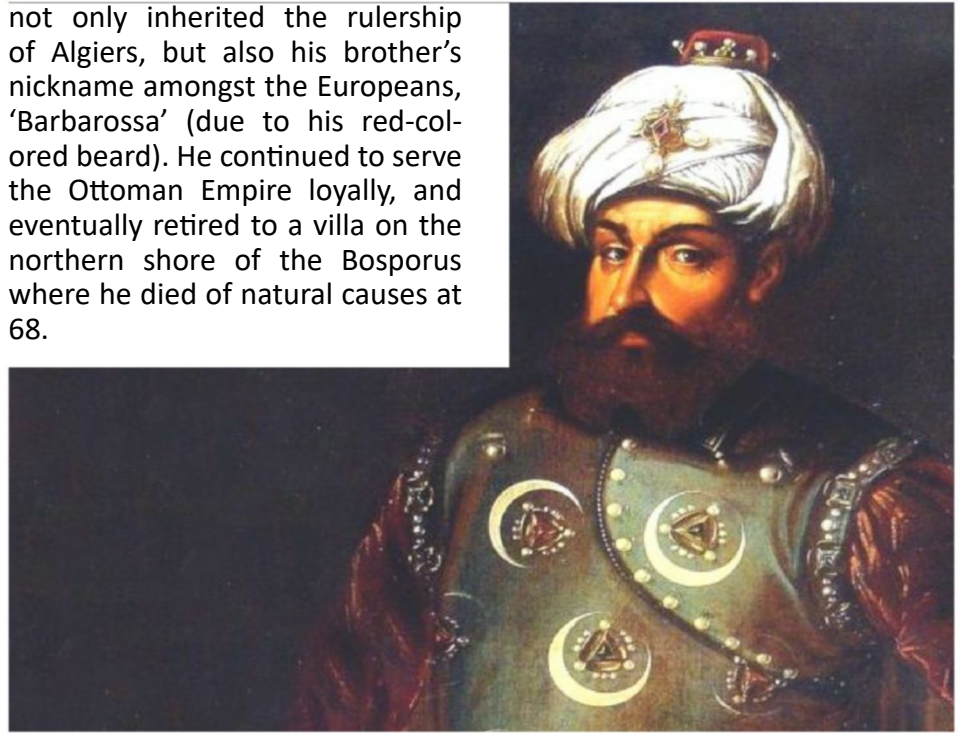
The ship he was imprisoned in sank off the coast of Florida, but he survived and began his career in piracy. He and the crew would pose as shipwrecked sailors and hail passing vessels for help. Once they were on board a ship, they would drop their disguise, rob the ship, and take the loot back to their hideout. In a disagreement about a woman, his partner and he had a duel, which Black Caesar won, killing his friend. Most sources claim that Black Caesar eventually joined the crew of another infamous pirate, Blackbeard. Eventually, Black Caesar's reign of terror came to an end in 1718, when he was convicted for piracy and hanged.

REDBEARD: THE BARBAROSSA BROTHERS

GREEK
1500 -1545

Hayreddin Barbarossa was one of the most notorious pirates of his day and one of the most successful naval commanders of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. Born on the Greek island of Lesbos around 1478, he was originally known as Khizr. He had three brothers and they all became pirates and attained riches and fame by capturing European vessels in the Mediterranean Sea and preying on Spanish and Portuguese ships as independent corsairs. They conquered the North African city of Algiers and submitted it to the Ottomans as a means of protecting themselves from the Spanish. By 1518, he was the only one of the brothers left, as they all had been killed during combat. Hayreddin

not only inherited the rulership of Algiers, but also his brother's nickname amongst the Europeans, 'Barbarossa' (due to his red-colored beard). He continued to serve the Ottoman Empire loyally, and eventually retired to a villa on the northern shore of the Bosphorus where he died of natural causes at 68.



5 Lost Pirate Treasures

1 Treasure of the Esperanza

During the 19th century, a large treasure consisting of 1.5 million gold pesos and an equal value of silver was looted from the Viceroyalty of Peru and loaded on the *Esperanza*, bound for the Spanish West Indies. The ship was attacked by pirates, who stole the treasure, but their ship was wrecked on Palmyra Atoll and the treasure has not been recovered since.

2 Treasure of the Nossa Senhora della Cabo

French pirate Olivier Levasseur (*La Buse*) was a notorious 18th-century pirate who amassed a great treasure following his plundering of the *Nossa Senhora della Cabo*, a Portuguese treasure ship. Before his execution by hanging, Levasseur allegedly threw a cryptogram into the crowd which revealed the location of his loot. To date, it has never been found.

3 Treasure of the São Vicente

In the 14th century, the *São Vicente* set sail from Portugal to France carrying the treasure of deceased Bishop of Lisboa, Thibaud de Castillon, including gold, silver, rings, tapestries, jewels, fine plates, and altars. The *São Vicente* was attacked by two pirate ships and the treasure was seized. One pirate ship was captured but didn't contain the loot. The other made a clean getaway. The location of the stolen treasure is unknown.



CHING SHIH: FROM PROSTITUTE TO PIRATE

CHINESE
1875 – 1844



Sometimes known as Madame Cheng, she was one of the most successful of pirates in history. Once a prostitute, upon the death of her pirate husband, she took over his entire 'Red Flag Fleet' (so

huge that it equaled all the other most successful pirates combined) and his operation. She made her adopted son, Cheung Po Tsai, the captain of the fleet as well as her lover, and with his help, they robbed and taxed coastal towns. They attacked ships in the South China Sea, sparring with major nations, such as the British Empire, the Portuguese Empire, and the Qing dynasty. Her wealth and infamy grew. Ching Shih controlled more than 1,500 ships and 80,000 men. The Chinese government eventually offered universal pirate amnesty in exchange for peace; she accepted this and lived out the remainder of her years in charge of a casino and brothel. She died at 69. ■

4 Treasure of Queen Anne's Revenge

The most famous pirate of the 18th century, Edward Teach, otherwise known as Blackbeard, prowled the West Indies and the Atlantic coast of North America in his flagship, *Queen Anne's Revenge*, attacking ships heading back to Spain from South America. Blackbeard was eventually captured and executed, but before his death, he claimed to have hidden a massive treasure. Many have searched for it, but it has never been located.

5 Captain Kidd's Treasure

Notorious pirate Captain William Kidd was a 17th-century Scottish sailor turned pirate who amassed huge wealth. Foreseeing his inevitable capture, he allegedly hid his treasure, which he hoped could be used as a bargaining chip to negotiate his release. Kidd was indeed captured and offered the treasure in exchange for a pardon, but his offer was refused. He took the secret of its location with him to the gallows. ■



MYSTERY A

FLOATING BLOCKS WITH CRYPTIC WRITING WASH UP ON BEACHES ACROSS EUROPE

A woman was walking along the sea on a beach in Cornwall, England in 2012, when she by chance spotted a dark tablet in the sand, inscribed with a strange word. She shrugged off the curiosity. But a few weeks later she discovered another one on a different beach. Without knowing it at the time, she'd stumbled upon a phenomenon that many others had been experiencing across Europe for decades. They were all now involved in the mystery of the Tjipetir blocks.

Not knowing how the rubber-like slabs might have come to be on various beaches and confounded by the word punched into them – TJIPETIR – beachcomber Tracey Williams began some research into the origins of the dark, rubbery blocks.

Williams found that Tjipetir is a village in West Java, Indonesia. Now named Cepetir, it was once the site of a Gutta-percha plantation during the late 19th and early 20th century. Gutta-percha “plates” were made from the gum of the Palaquium tree. The dark-colored, rubbery latex substance was used widely in the manufacturing of items such as toys, golf balls, false teeth, surgical devices, jewelry, and furniture, and was key in the development of underwater telegraph cables.

In Malaysia, the indigenous people would use the wood and gum of the tree for making knife handles and walking sticks long before it was adopted by the Western world.

BY LIZ LEAFLOOR

For decades people had been finding the inscribed plates washed up on beaches across the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Netherlands, and Sweden. But the question remained: how had the plates made their way from Indonesia to the beaches of Europe?

The answer is still not certain, but it is speculated that the blocks may have spilled into the ocean in 1912, as the famously sunken ship, the *Titanic*, had Gutta-percha tablets and bales of rubber listed on the ocean liner's cargo manifest.

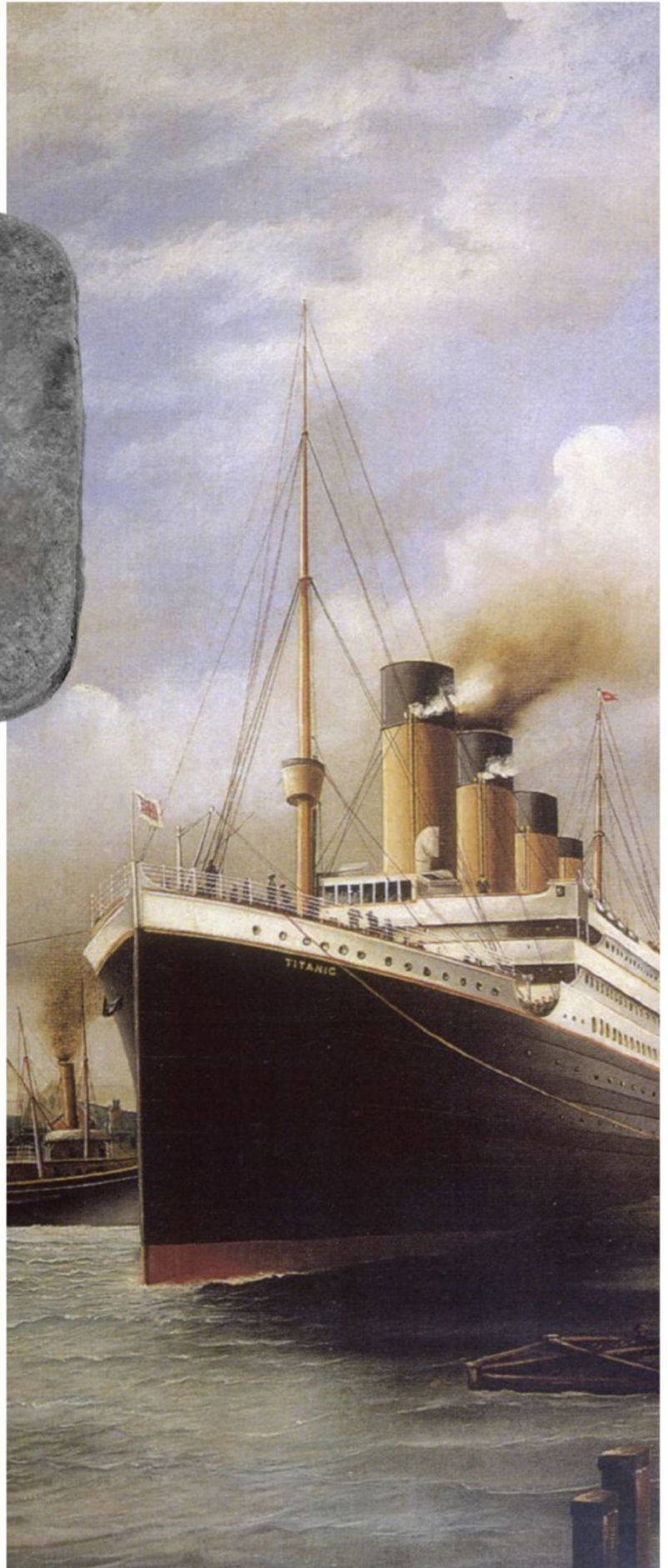
Right: Late-19th-century Indonesian gutta-percha plantation with stacks of rubber-like blocks



T SEA



Tropenmuseum/CC BY SA 3.0



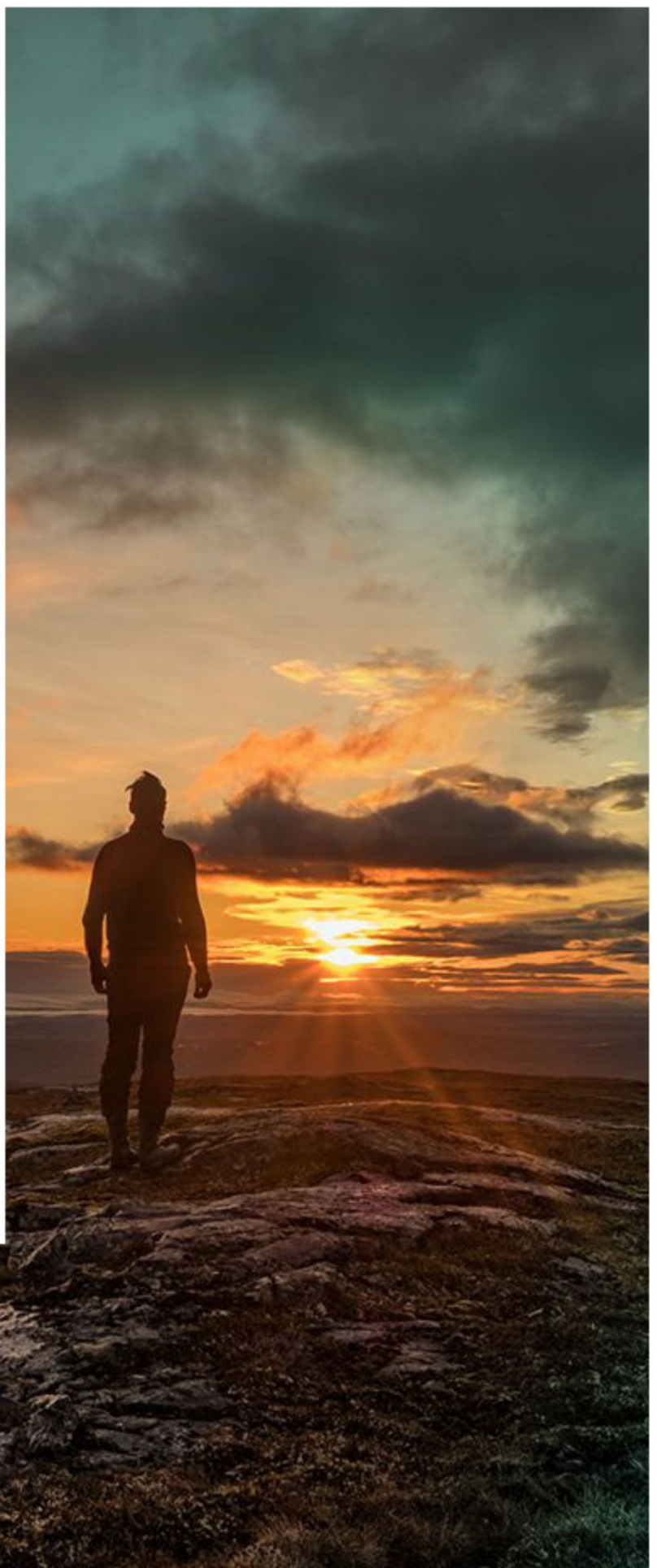
Alternatively, the tablets might have come from another stricken boat, a Japanese passenger ship named *Miyazaki Maru*. The *Miyazaki Maru* was said to have been carrying the rubber plates from Yokohama to London but was sunk by a German submarine torpedo in May 1917.

The plates might be still coming from any number of wrecks, floating to the surface as the sunken ship breaks up below.

As it takes some 25 years for floating debris to go around the world via currents, it may prove impossible to confirm the truth of the origins of the Tjipetir blocks, which will have been at sea for over a century. As they are a natural product, in time the blocks will degrade and eventually return to nature.

Not considered mere flotsam by those who are lucky enough to stumble across them, the Gutta-percha plates from the Tjipetir factory are held in special regard by their new owners. The pieces of history are described by Marina de Jesus on the Tjipetir Mystery Community Facebook page as “a fabulous gift from the ocean.” Undoubtedly the slabs will continue to be retrieved from beaches by the curious and will serve to unite people in history. Yet many Tjipetir blocks will remain undiscovered, traveling the seas and drifting ashore once in a while, only to return to the waters by the pull of tides. ■

A FABULOUS GIFT FROM THE OCEAN



The Devil's Sea

THE Devil's Sea, otherwise known as the Dragon's Triangle, is a region in the Pacific Ocean that has come to be associated with numerous accounts of disappearing ships and planes, sightings of ghost ships and islands, extreme weather and electro-magnetic disturbances, with historical accounts of strange phenomena stemming back at least 3,000 years.

Known as *Ma No Umi* in Japanese, the Devil's Sea is located between the Japanese Coast, about 62 miles south of Tokyo, the east coast of the Philippines, level with Manila, and the west coast of Guam, a U.S. island territory in Micronesia. It includes a major section of the Philippine Sea.

The Devil's Sea region is purported to be one of twelve 'Vile Vortices' on the planet; sites of high electromagnetic aberrations. The 12 sites are in a pattern around the Earth and are situated at the same latitudes north and south of the equator—the most famous one being The Bermuda Triangle. It's theorized that the electromagnetic disturbances are caused by hot and cold currents crossing at these points, which could affect navigational instruments in vessels and perhaps account for missing ships and planes, and other mysterious phenomena.

The ill-fated region was known about by the ancient Chinese as far back as 1000 BC. According to mythological accounts, a huge dragon inhabited this area of sea and lay in wait for any vessel to pass. The dragon with the insatiable hunger would drag any boat that crossed its path into the sea, never to be seen of again.



During the 13th century, the Mongols attempted two major invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 AD. However, on both occasions, the Mongol fleet had to cross the Devil's Sea but was obliterated in extreme weather, forcing the attackers to abandon their plans, fortuitously saving Japan from foreign conquest. The Japanese believed the typhoons had been sent from the gods to protect them from their enemies. Today, divers are still recovering ruins from the Mongol fleets that were destroyed in their journey across the Devil's Sea. But the remains of the tens of thousands of soldiers that perished have long gone.

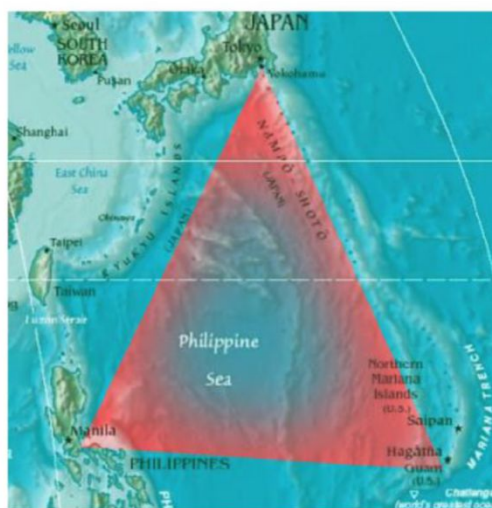
Legends and mysterious accounts connected with the Devil's Sea shot to fame in the late 1980s after Charles Berlitz published a

book titled 'The Dragon's Triangle'. According to Berlitz, the Devil's Sea is every bit as dangerous and mysterious as the Bermuda Triangle, with over 700 people losing their lives there between 1952 and 1954.

The region in and around the Devil's Sea is a volcanically active area and small islands in the area also disappear and new islands appear as a result of the seismic activity. According to many investigators, the volcanoes and

seismic events can account for many of the strange occurrences in the Devil's Sea, including extreme weather, missing boats, sightings of 'ghost islands,' and electro-magnetic disturbances.

Nevertheless, some remain convinced that there is more going on inside the Dragon's Triangle and local superstitions prevent many from entering its territory! ■



Hanging Coffins

The Igorots tribe of Sagada, Philippines practice a 2,000-year-old funerary custom, in which the dead are buried in coffins that are tied or nailed to the side of cliffs. The coffins are said to be carved by the elderly before they die, or if they're too weak, by their children. During the procession to the cliffs, people would grab at the body because it is believed that the deceased's blood can transfer skills. It is commonly thought that by placing the coffin on the side of a cliff, the deceased would be brought closer to heaven and to their ancestral spirits—and it is out of reach of animals and headhunters.

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DYING TO LIVE FOREVER

THE RITUAL OF SELF-MUMMIFICATION

BY DR. KEN JEREMIAH

SUNADA TETSU (1768-1829) was arguably the most famous individual who successfully mummified himself. Early in his life, Tetsu was not religiously inclined, but this changed due to an incident of which the specifics remain unclear. What is known is that Tetsu had loved a prostitute in Akagawa, the city of Tsuruoka's (Japan) pleasure district, and one day he had to fight two samurai over the girl. They drew their swords, and he killed them. To escape a punishment of death, he fled to Churen Temple in Oaminaka. There he embraced the Shugendo faith and became an ascetic. His austere training was an inspiration to other like-minded people, and they followed him.



"I HAVE TO LEAVE MY BODY
IN THIS WORLD AND
BECOME A SOKUSHINBUTSU"



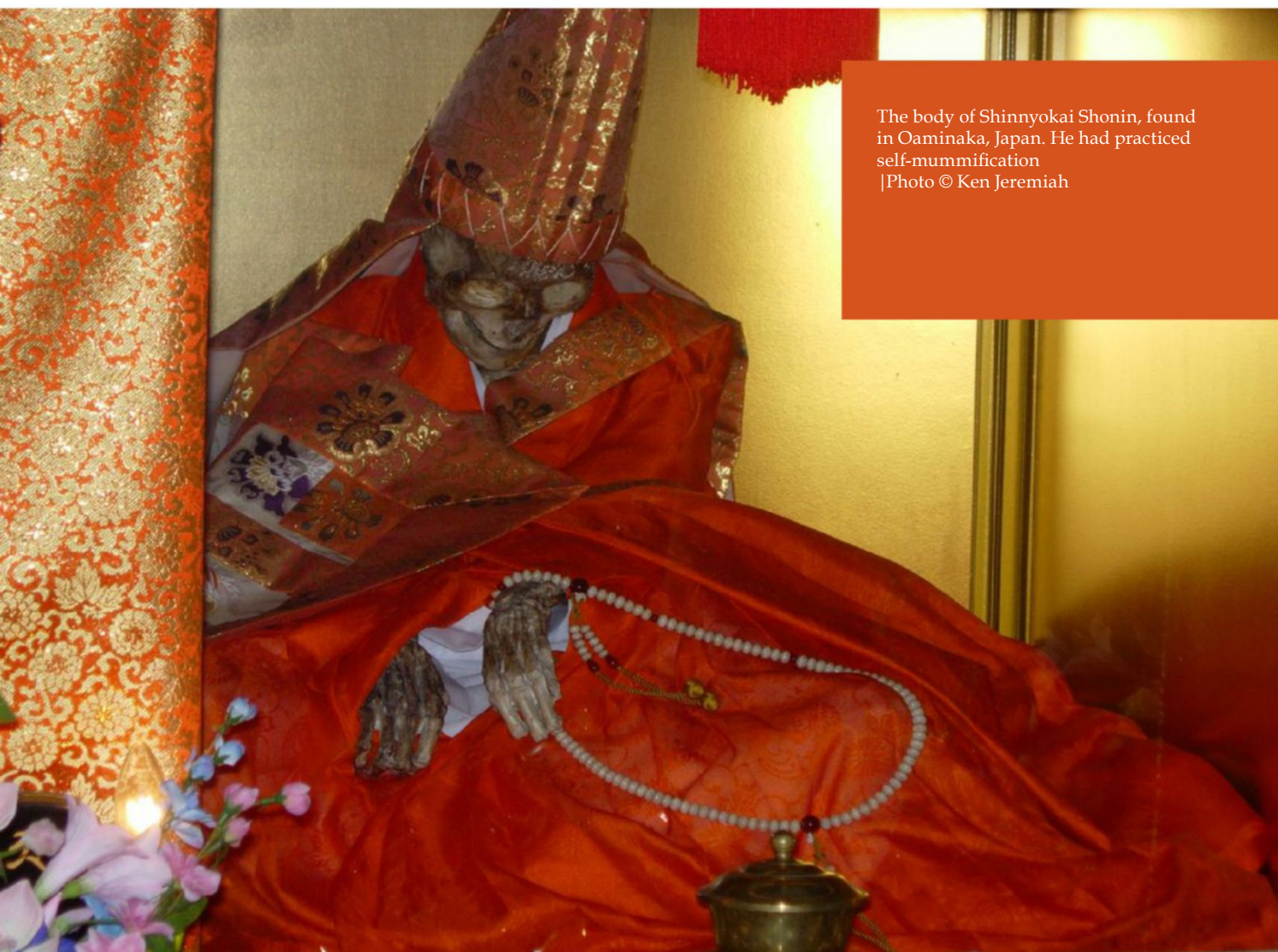


Tetsu and his following toured Japan, repairing temples and building bridges, and generally assisting where they could. Eye disease was blinding people in Edo (modern-day Tokyo), and Tetsu lacked the means to (secularly) help them. Praying for a cure, he cut out his own eye and threw it into the Sumida River. After years of continuous asceticism, he buried himself alive. He said, "As long as I have a body, even if I work myself to the bone, I can still bring salvation to humankind. However, if I die, I cannot. To continue bringing salvation to humankind, I have to leave my body in this world and become a *sokushinbutsu* (one who has attained Buddhahood in the flesh)."

Tetsumonkai, as he was now called, engaged in a strange diet called *mokujikigyo* (tree-eating), which involved eliminating grains. Over the course of 3,000 days, he reduced the amount of food he ingested so, at the end, he would starve to death. He supplemented his meager intake with strange substances like pinesap, pine needles, butterburs, and bark, thinking that such items would help to preserve his body.

In 1829, when he was 62 years old, there was a banquet and all of his friends and disciples gathered. He remarked that it was great to die surrounded by such great people. The next day, he stepped into a coffin in Churen's main hall with a bell. It was sealed and then lowered into an earthen hole. A small bamboo tube provided oxygen, and he chanted and rang the bell until he died. Once his followers heard silence, they did something unusual; they pulled him out and dried his body with candle fires and incense. (Normally, such bodies were untreated.) Then, they reburied him for three years, after which they unearthed and redressed him before enshrining him in the main hall at Churen Temple. Since he had mummified, he was called *sokushinbutsu*: Living Buddha.

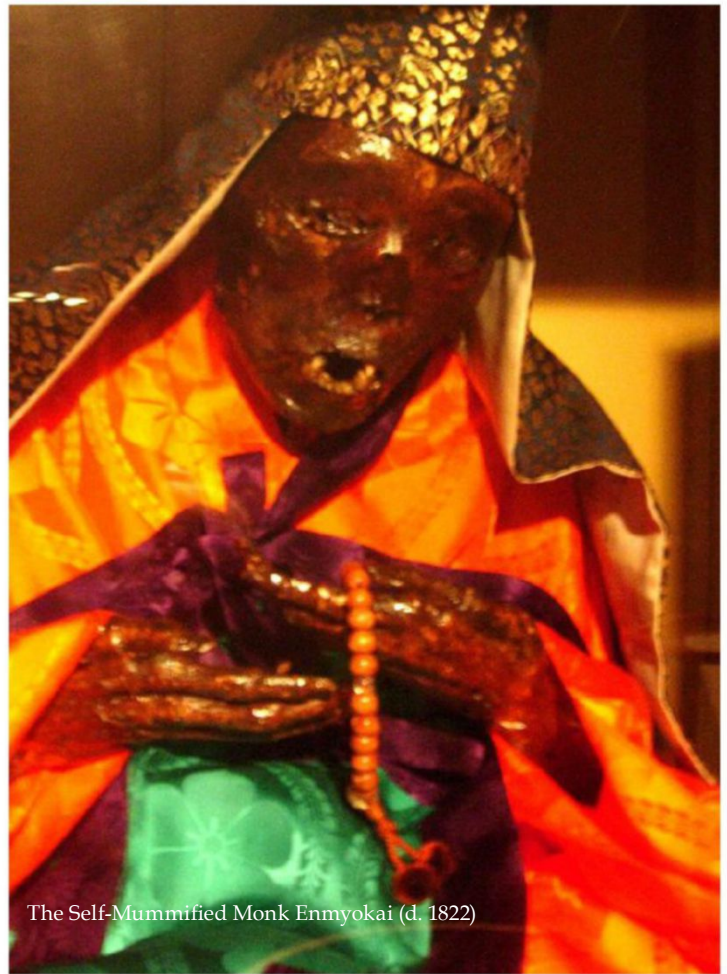
It was thought that he had attained a state called *nyujo*, which was like suspended animation: neither alive nor dead. Many wanted to achieve this state of being, though fewer than twenty in Japan are considered to have been successful.



The body of Shinnyokai Shonin, found in Oaminaka, Japan. He had practiced self-mummification
|Photo © Ken Jeremiah



The Self-Mummified Monk Chukai
| Photos © Ken Jeremiah



The Self-Mummified Monk Enmyokai (d. 1822)

The reasons behind such a desire are complex, and they connect to the Chinese Daoist pursuit of immortality, which influenced Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism and other faiths. The early Chinese believed that the soul was composed of multiple parts (called *hun* and *po*), and after death, these parts dissipated, therefore never perpetuating the existence of the deceased. The only way to keep them together and thus continue (living) in a spiritual form was to leave the body intentionally, as a cicada leaves its husk; intentionally exiting the body required awareness at the moment of death. Some Ch'an monks died and then naturally

mummified in meditative posture, and it was believed that they had accomplished this feat. Many Chinese ideas entered Japan and were absorbed by the Shugendo tradition (which was itself assimilated into Shingon Buddhism). The monks who chose to mummify themselves similarly believed that they must be mindful when the transition from life to death began. They thought of it as a dream. If you do not know you are dreaming, you are just swept up into your surroundings, but if you recognize that you are in a dream, you can consciously control your actions; you might even be able to affect the dream's substantive

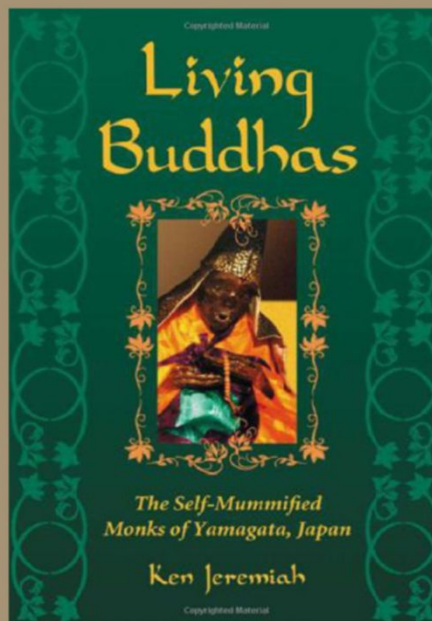
nature. This is called lucid dreaming. The *sokushinbutsu* (self-mummified monks) viewed death similarly. To maintain awareness, and to keep their spiritual essence intact, they caused their own deaths. This explains one of their actions. A different idea justified their bodily preservation.

When people joined the Shugendo faith, they became *issei gyonin*, a term that means "one who is an ascetic for his or her entire life." Adherents trained at a special place near Mt. Yudono called Senninzawa (literally, hermit's mountain stream). Stone markers record their deeds. They mention those who secluded themselves

THEY ADOPTED A DIET THAT ENCOURAGED BODILY PRESERVATION AND THEN BURIED THEMSELVES ALIVE

on mountains for 1,000 days, and others who fasted (with cereals) for 3,000. Such individuals sometimes performed even more incredible austerities, like setting fire to their fingers, cutting off body parts, or torturing themselves in other ways. These practices, justified by an interpretation of Lotus Sutra passages, were thought to create merit: an energy source that infuses the physical body.

A similar idea exists in Catholic Christianity. Its clergy preserves the bodies of saints and venerables, believing that they are reservoirs of divine power. In early Christianity, the faithful slept near perceived holy bodies because they thought such proximity would facilitate their entrance into heaven. They also believed that miracles could occur by praying near holy corpses. According to the self-mummified monks' beliefs, merit is the energy within the body that could permit such miracles. They also believed that a correlation exists between the spirit and body. If the body is stressed, the spirit strengthens. Since this energy could benefit humankind, they embraced asceticism to increase spiritual strength. However, they faced a conundrum. If they did not quit their bodies, they could not serve Maitreya, the Future Buddha, in the Tusita Heaven. But if their bodies were destroyed, the merit that infused them could not benefit others. For this reason, they adopted a diet that encouraged bodily preservation and then buried themselves alive. Self-mummification was a complicated process, and few who attempted it were successful. Many perished before their interments. Ishinkai (d. 1831) died before completing a 2,000-day cereal fast, and Zenkai (d. 1856) did not make it through 1,000 days.

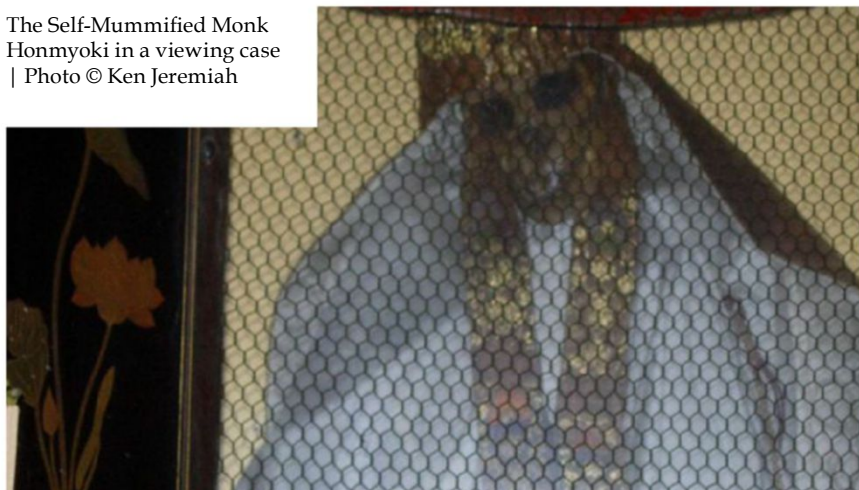


Living Buddhas: The Self-Mummified Monks of Yamagata, Japan

By Dr. Ken Jeremiah

Northern Japan is home to an ancient, esoteric tradition of self-mummifying Buddhist monks, little known to the outside world. Long after death, these ascetics continue to be revered as Living Buddhas. This first English-language work on the subject recounts the process by which these monks starve themselves for a decade, bury themselves alive with only a small breathing tube, and meditate until death. After three years, the mummified body is exhumed and displayed. | [Get it on Amazon](#)

The Self-Mummified Monk
Honmyoki in a viewing case
| Photo © Ken Jeremiah



Besides those who died, others changed their minds during the lengthy self-mummification process. It is a difficult thing to plan one's own death through years of self-imposed torture. Only truly unique individuals could have the dedication and focus needed to attain this incredible goal. Of the many people who attempted the process, approximately thirty were successful. Seventeen of their bodies are extant, and ten are still enshrined in northern Japanese temples. They include Togashi Kichihyoei (1623-1681), a samurai retainer who became a priest and took the religious name Honmyokai, and the farmer Shindo Nizaemon (1688-1783), who became Shinnyokai. Their bodies, along with others, are preserved. Some have flesh on their faces, torsos, and hands, while others are mostly skeletons. Even if one had successfully mummified, time eventually destroys. It keeps affecting bodily destruction, as everyone will one day return to dust. Nevertheless, such monks are still seated in a meditative posture, dressed in priestly garments. They are considered living Buddhas, the equivalent of Saints, Bodhisattvas, or Arhats, and according to locals, their spirits are still present, assisting humankind. ■



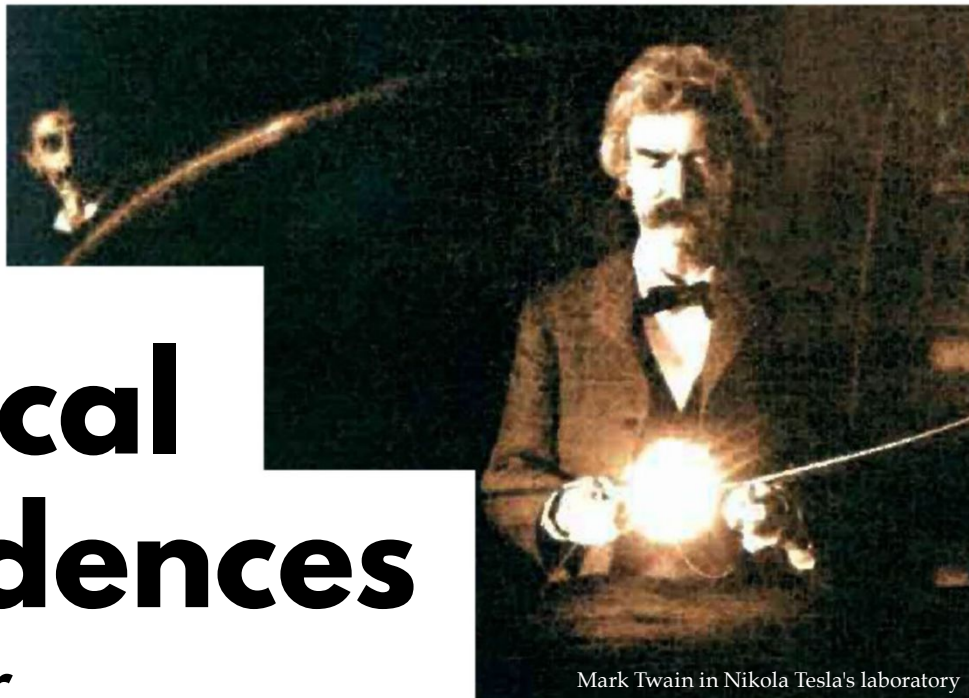


Crazy Historical Coincidences

**Synchronicity or
Mathematical
Probability?**

By Ashley Cowie

**History is
composed of
brilliant acts of
skill and bizarre
'coincidences'
that often seem
so incredible that
many people have
been convinced
higher powers
were at play**



Mark Twain in Nikola Tesla's laboratory

Coincidences are a concurrence of circumstances that are so unpredictable they often become associated with the supernatural and paranormal. History is composed of brilliant acts of skill and is also full of bizarre 'coincidences' that often seem so incredible that many people have been convinced higher powers were at play.

Mathematicians describe coincidences as probabilities and deem them as inevitable, meaning they can be given odds of occurring. It is when the odds of an occurrence are lowest that events are thought of as being coincidental, and when the odds are so low that the 'probable' becomes the 'improbable', then some events can appear almost miraculous.

So far as mathematicians and near miracles are concerned, Stephen Hawking, one of the greatest scientific minds in all of history, would have struggled to work out the chances of his own birthday, January 8, 1942, falling on the 300th anniversary of the death of another great scientist, Galileo Galilei. What is more, Stephen Hawking's death occurred on Einstein's birthday, March 14 – Pi Day – when the calendar reads 3.14.

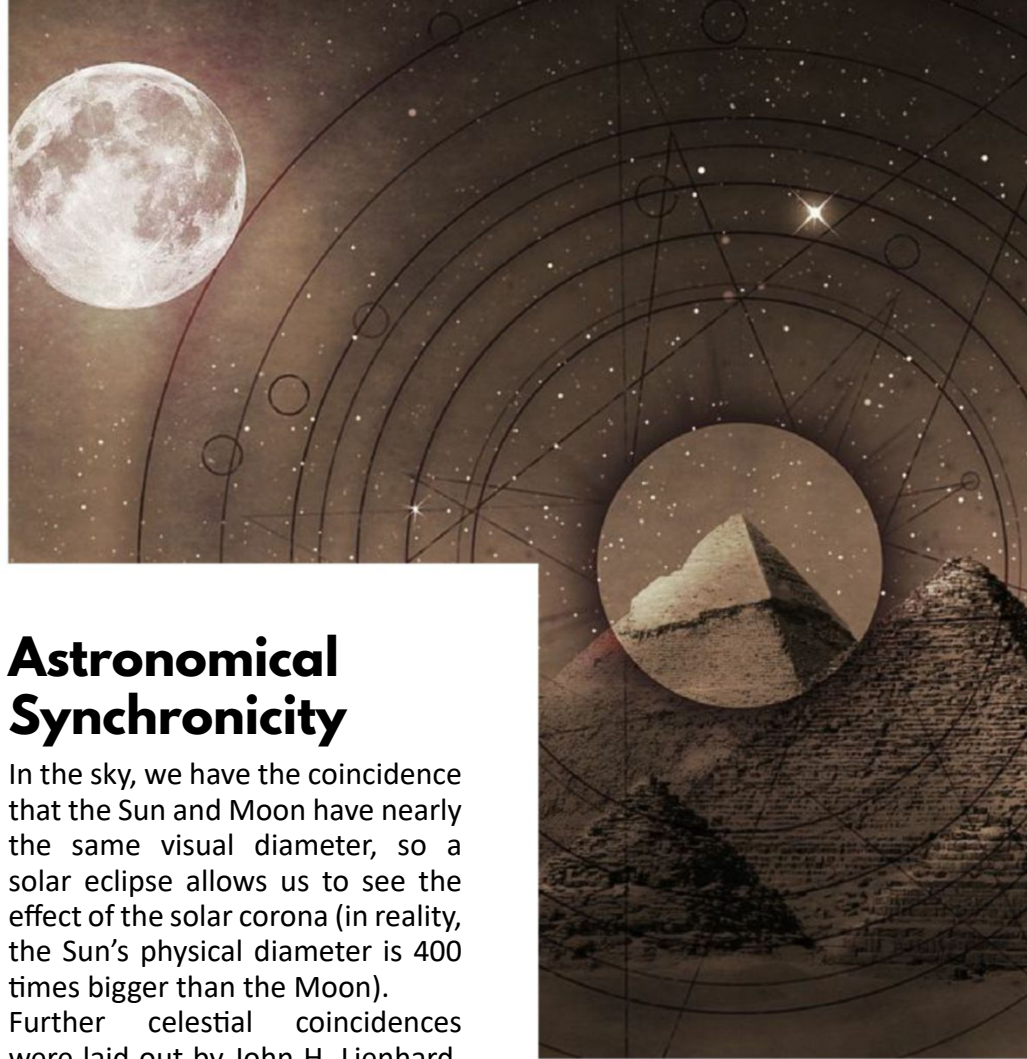
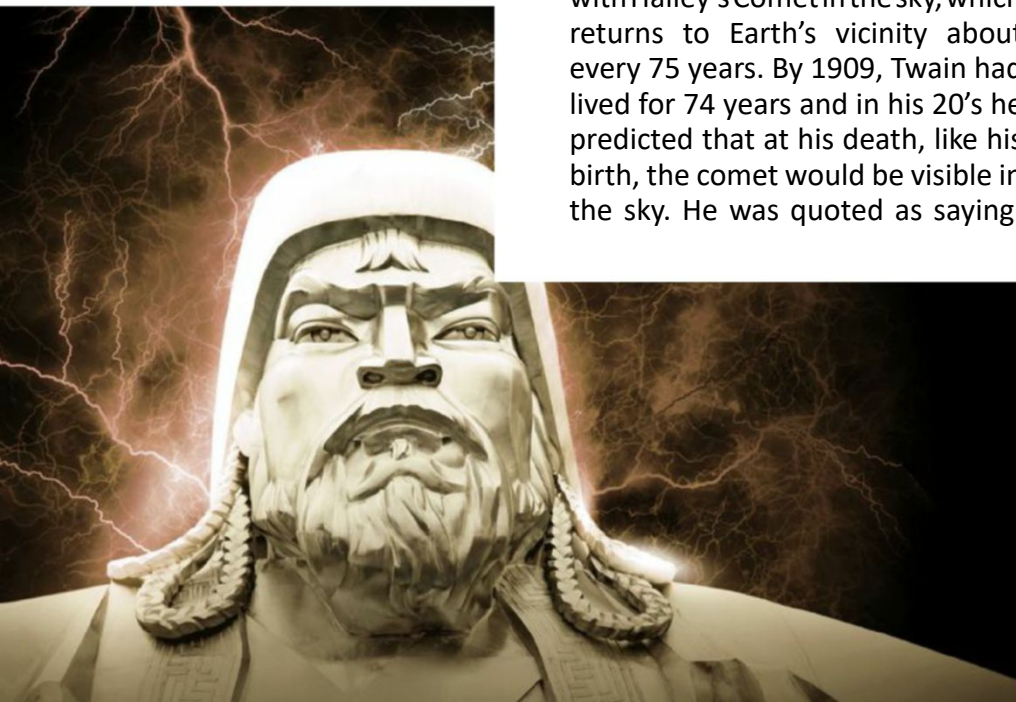
Before we look at exactly what a coincidence is scientifically, and why they occur so frequently, let's first explore some of history's most perplexing and apparently extraordinary coincidences that seem to stretch mathematical probability to its very extremes.

Political Flukes

Romulus was the founder of Rome and the first king of the Roman Empire, while the first emperor was Augustus. When the Roman Empire collapsed, coincidentally, the emperor who watched it burn to the ground was Romulus Augustus!

Thomas Jefferson, a Founding Father of the United States of America, died on the 50th anniversary of July 4 (Independence Day), and so did John Adams, another Founding Father. Following in the footsteps of this morbid tradition, fellow founder and president James Monroe died five years later, again, on July 4.

Genghis Khan famously and violently rampaged throughout the Eurasian continent and his direct descendant Amir Timur (1336 - 1405) was the first ruler of the Turco-Mongol Timurid dynasty from 1370 until his death. On June 20, 1941, Soviet Union archaeologists uncovered Timur's tomb and found an inscription reading: "Whoever opens my tomb shall unleash an invader more terrible than I." And stories say that two days later the Nazis launched their invasion of the USSR with Operation Barbarossa.



Astronomical Synchronicity

In the sky, we have the coincidence that the Sun and Moon have nearly the same visual diameter, so a solar eclipse allows us to see the effect of the solar corona (in reality, the Sun's physical diameter is 400 times bigger than the Moon).

Further celestial coincidences were laid out by John H. Lienhard, Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering and History at the University of Houston, in his book *'The Engines of Our Ingenuity'*, which tells the fascinating coincidence of Mark Twain's birth and death.

On November 30, 1835 in Florida, Missouri, Mark Twain was born with Halley's Comet in the sky, which returns to Earth's vicinity about every 75 years. By 1909, Twain had lived for 74 years and in his 20's he predicted that at his death, like his birth, the comet would be visible in the sky. He was quoted as saying:

"It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's Comet. The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together!'" Twain suffered a heart attack on April 21, 1910, only 12 hours after Halley's Comet emerged from the far side of the Sun.

Another head-scratcher is that the mass of the Great Pyramid is estimated at nearly six million tons and if one multiplies this by one hundred million, you get the approximate mass of the Earth. Furthermore, the exact geographical coordinates of the Great Pyramid of Giza are 29.9792458°N and the speed of light is 299,792,458 meters per second. At first glance these facts seem far too accurate to be mere coincidence, but watch how easy all this is rationalized.

The Skeptical Tools of Synchronicity and Serendipity

Firstly, ancient Egyptian builders measured in cubits, between 17.48 inches and 20.83 inches long. The meter measurement was not made official until the 1700s. And it has been said that “If they actually knew about the meter one would expect them to use such unit for measurement as well. They simply did not. A matching sequence of five digits is not particularly strange or extraordinary. People have won the lottery matching far longer sequences than just five digits. Sometimes numbers simply match up without any connection whatsoever.” So because this argument requires some forcing we can conclude that this is likely nothing but a coincidence.

Horace Walpole (1717-1797) was a member of the British House of Commons in the 18th century who had a habit of ‘finding what he needed, just when he needed it’. Walpole gave a name to his uncanny ability to find things unexpectedly —“serendipity”— which meant ‘finding something by informed observation’ (sagacity as he called it) *and* by accident. Some sources say, “The main ingredients of ‘serendipity’ include luck, chance, active searching, and informed observation.”

Measuring the chance, or the probability, of a coincidence allows for the discernment between coincidences and causally connected events. The paradox of probability theory is used to predict the ‘outcomes’ of a large number of individual occurrences,

The main ingredients of ‘serendipity’ include luck, chance, active searching, and informed observation

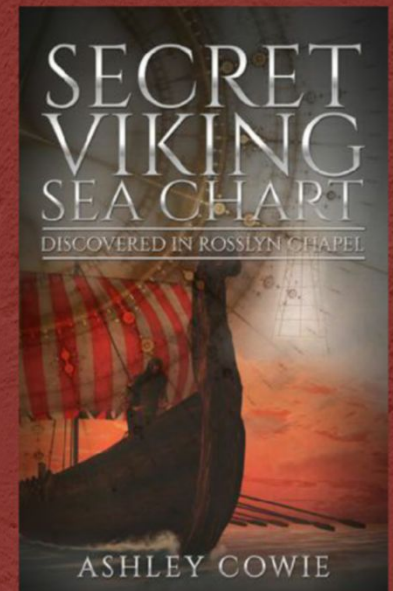


Horatio Walpole, 4th Earl of Orford

Secret Viking Sea Chart: Discovered in Rosslyn Chapel

By Ashley Cowie

Hidden in a chamber beneath Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, TV Historian Ashley Cowie discovered a unique group of symbols and spent ten years exhaustively deciphering their meaning. After presenting his research at the International Science Festival his discovery was tested by professional scientists at Bradford University who confirmed that he had discovered an extraordinarily rare Viking sea chart. Not only does the chart reveal an ancient prime meridian lying dormant in the northern Scottish landscapes, but it also identifies several Viking power bases, including North America, which the Viking's colonized around 1000 AD, five hundred years before Columbus set sail.



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even though each one itself might be unpredictable.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli, the Austrian-born Swiss and American theoretical physicist, theorized that remarkable coincidences occur through “synchronicity,” which they defined as a “causal” connecting principle. The Jung-Pauli theory of “synchronicity” states that while coincidences lacked apparent causal connection, their occurrences together have meaning for observers. To become “synchronicity,” the apparently unrelated events should be “unlikely to occur together by chance”. Even though Jung and Pauli were two very bright people, their theory is often questioned because if something happened there had to have been a chance, no matter how small the odds of that chance occurring. According to scholars David Lane and Andrea Diem Lane, in their 2010 book *Desultory Decussation: Where Littlewood’s Law of Miracles meets Jung’s Synchronicity*, skeptics argue that what one perceives as “synchronicity” is merely an instance of apophenia, the tendency to mistakenly perceive connections and meaning between unrelated things and that the probability and statistical theory presented in Littlewood’s Law explains such ‘perceived’ remarkable coincidences. ■

BORSCHT

A MEDIEVAL PEASANT FOOD
THAT TRAVELED TO SPACE!

BY ALICIA MCDERMOTT



THE TASTY,
TART SOUP WAS
CONSIDERED
A 'PEASANT'
FOOD

There are few foods that create as much international debate as the ruby-red soup known as borscht. The two big contenders for the soup's homeland are Russia and Ukraine. Although debate continues, food historians think they have solved the mystery.

Most of them agree that the origins of the soup come from sometime between the fifth and ninth centuries AD in the area that is now known as Ukraine. But borscht would have been different back then. For one thing, the main ingredient was cow-parsnips, which were called "b'rshch" in the Old Slavic language.

Medieval herbalists wrote that cow-parsnips were usually collected in May, before the shoots became too tough and stringy. And then a cook would chop up the flowers, stems, and leaves, put them in a pot with water, and leave the mix to ferment. When ready, the sour-tasting liquid, which was also believed to be a miracle cure for hangovers, would be combined with chicken or beef broth, egg yolks, and cream or millet meal, to make a soup.

These days borscht may be considered a wonderful comfort food, but given the nature and simple ingredients in its origins, it's perhaps unsurprising that the tasty, tart soup was considered a 'peasant' food. The nobility didn't start to take on the humble fare until well into the 17th century. But that decision meant that borscht was going to see some big transformations.

New ingredients were added to reflect the crops that were cultivated in the different regions where the soup had spread (by now it had reached the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). Now 'borscht' was being used to describe a huge variety of sour soups. Long gone were the days when cow-parsnips were the key to the food; new sour options such as lemon, fermented flour or rye bread and water (called 'kissel' with flour or 'kvass' with bread), sorrel, and cabbage had replaced them. Cabbage and kvass were especially popular.

Most of these varieties would have made either a white or green borscht. But red borscht, which has taken over the food world, didn't appear until much later. It wasn't until the mid-16th century that beetroot reached the Slavic world. And for some time it was a rarity.

There are two main legends of how red borscht emerged. The most popular says that hungry Don Cossacks made it when Peter the Great sieged Azov in 1695 and they combined all the food they could find to avoid starvation. The second story is that starving Zaphorozhian Cossacks from the Dneiper Rapids came up with the idea during the siege of Vienna in 1683. But others disagree and say it was regular ethnic Ukrainian peasants living under Russian rule who first made the ruby-red version of the soup sometime in the late 17th or early 18th century.

And that early red borscht is what has inspired the recipe you'll find below – it was a relatively simple and nutritious mix of beetroot, cabbage, and carrots cooked in a broth with tasty additions such as dill, spring onions, parsley, and garlic. In some regions, such as Lithuania, 'kefir' (a fermented milk product) or sour cream was also included, along with boiled eggs. Pork, beef, or chicken would also be added on special occasions. In the 19th century, potatoes and tomatoes were brought into the mix too – and that rounds out my favorite version of borscht.

But there are actually three main variations to borscht: red, green, and cold. Red (classic) borscht is the one described in the recipe below. It is often left to 'infuse' for at least a half an hour after cooking is complete (some would say



Beet Harvest, Leon Wyczółkowski 1893

it tastes even better the next day) and it is served hot, usually with a nice helping of sour cream. Green borscht, also known as spring borscht, generally includes sorrel, nettle, saltbush, young beetroot leaves, boiled eggs, and sour cream. This is also eaten hot. And finally, there is the cold, summer variety of borscht. Cold borscht is usually vegetarian (no meat broth is used) and it includes beets, parsley, dill, spring onions, garlic, sour cream or whey, and boiled eggs.

You can see by now that borscht recipes differ – some are clear and light, while others are thick and substantial. It's even said that every Ukrainian and Russian family has an original borscht recipe of its own! As borscht recipes evolved to suit different palates, the food spread more and started to have an even bigger impact on society.



Christians took a liking to the food for times of fasting; Polish people used fish stock instead of chicken or beef to create a traditional Christmas Eve meal; Ukrainians created all sorts of borscht for their funeral feasts; and Ashkenazi Jews adopted the hot variety of the simple soup for Passover and the cold version with a generous helping of sour cream as a daytime meal during Shavuot. The Ashkenazi Jews are also credited with taking borscht to the United States, where their habit of eating the soup during holidays in the Catskill Mountains led to the region being called the 'Borscht Belt.' And in Soviet

COSMONAUTS EVEN TOOK FREEZE-DRIED BORSCHT INTO SPACE!

Russia, novelists wrote about borscht, some politicians (such as Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev) ate it every day, and the cosmonauts even took freeze-dried

borscht into space!

Nowadays, borscht is an emblematic hearty meal linked to family, friends, and comfort.

It's really hearty and nutrient rich and hot borscht will help to warm up in winter or cold borscht will refresh you in the summer. Regardless of your choices for vegetables, stock, temperature, or company, you should remember one important detail about true borscht – it is a dish of home and hearth and heart! ■

Recipe on the next page



Aliazimi/CC BY 3.0

Is there nothing borscht can't do?
Russian Borscht soup in tube,
consumed by cosmonauts in space



BORSCHT

INGREDIENTS

1/2 Cup Celery, diced
1 Cup White Onions, diced
1 Cup Cabbage, chopped or grated
1 Tbsp Butter
2 Cloves Garlic, diced or pressed
6 Cups Beef Broth or Chicken Broth or Vegetable Broth
3 1/2 Tbsp Tomato Paste
2-3 Large Beets, peeled (half grated and half diced)
1-2 Medium Carrots, grated
1 Medium Potato, diced
1/2 Cup Fresh Dill, diced (or 2 tsp Dried Dill)
Salt and Pepper, to taste

METHOD

Put the onions, celery, and cabbage in a large pot and sauté them in butter until they are soft and translucent.

Add the garlic, broth, and tomato paste. Bring this to a boil and then reduce the burner to medium heat.

Peel the beets, carrots, and potato. Then dice half the beets and grate the other half. Grate all the carrots. Dice the potato. Add all of these ingredients to the broth.

Allow the soup to simmer on medium heat until the diced beets and potatoes are soft (test them with a fork or by biting into them).

Remove the soup from the heat and stir in chopped fresh dill weed and salt and pepper.

Serve with a generous dollop of sour cream and a slice of bread and butter (rye bread is best!)



NOTES

The amount of broth you add will have an impact on the thickness of the borscht. This recipe provides a soup that's closer to a stew in consistency (heavier on vegetables, less on liquid). If you want a thinner borscht add another cup or cup and a half of broth, or for an even thicker borscht decrease the broth by one cup.

Borscht tastes extra great if you leave the flavors to infuse for at least half an hour after cooking and before serving. It tastes even better when you re-heat it the next day! ■

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